OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

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RISE OF THE ROBOTS

THE WHOLE SORRY STORY BEHIND THIS GAMING TRAVESTY

THE MAKING OF...

SENSIBLE SOCCER

JON HARE CHATS ABOUT FUNNY TEAM NAMES, LITTLE MEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL GAME



DONKEY KONG

MONKEY MAGIC! 26 GLORIOUS YEARS WITH THE PLATFORMING PRIMATE

BOMB JACK

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT DIFFUSING BOMBS COULD BE SO MUCH FUN?

THE SIMPSONS

HITTING A HOMER RUN WITH KONAMI'S FABULOUS COIN-OP



RETROINSPECTION

ATARI LYNX

"WE WERE THE FIRST NON-NINTENDO PEOPLE TO LEARN OF THE GAME BOY. WE WERE CRUSHED"

THE MAGNIFICENT 7

TAKING A LOOK INSIDE ONE OF OCEAN'S GREATEST 8-BIT COMPILATIONS

COMPANY PROFILE

BULL FROG

REVISITING THE GENIUSES BEHIND POPULOUS & THEME PARK

THIS MONTH IN RETRO GAMER

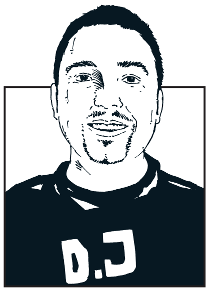
COLIN McRAE RALLY
IN THE DRIVING SEAT WITH ONE OF THE PLAYSTATION'S GREATEST RACERS

BIONIC COMMANDO
FORGET THE BIONIC MAN AND WOMAN AND MEET CAPCOM'S SWINGING HERO

DIABLO
BEHIND THE SCENES OF BLIZZARD'S PC HIT

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE BULLFROG GAME?



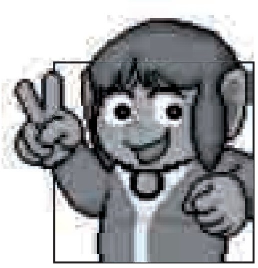
DARRAN JONES

It has to be *Theme Hospital*. Mainly because it cleverly built on *Theme Park* and had some amazingly funny illnesses to diagnose. My particular favourite being slack tongue.
Expertise: Shooting things, shooting things and shooting things
Currently playing:
Sin And Punishment
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



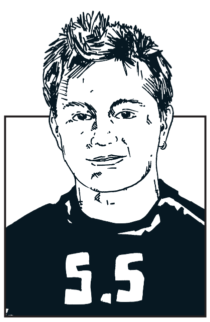
MARTYN CARROLL

Magic Carpet. Not Bullfrog's best game, but it was one of the first PlayStation games I owned and since then I've always had a soft spot for airborne wizard action.
Expertise: Micros with insufficient memory
Currently playing:
Herbert's Dummy Run!
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



STUART HUNT

It has to be *Syndicate Wars* for me. Being handed a pack of cybernetic mini-gun-toting wolves to level buildings and mind-jack dignitaries blew me away. It's the ultimate gritty game noir.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Stranglehold
Favourite game of all time:
Lucky & Wild



SPANNER

Populous did it for me. Until then, I wasn't interested in anything that didn't have flying blood and wall-to-wall death. *Populous* was the first time thinking was actually fun.
Expertise:
Planet engineering
Currently playing:
God
Favourite game of all time:
Creation/Genocide



PAUL DRURY

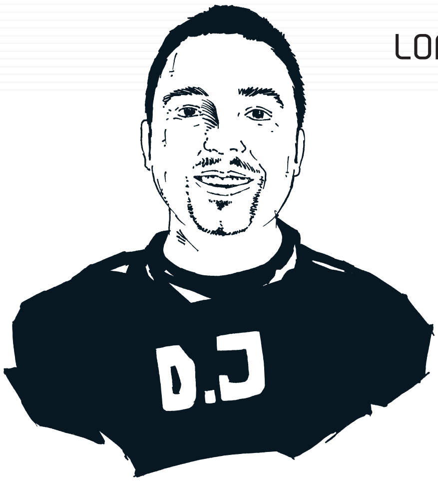
Magic Carpet. Swooping over dunes and raising castles from the desert sands felt truly magical in the early days of the PlayStation and made the new console seem full of Eastern promise.
Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
PaRappa The Rapper
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

If forced to choose between *Populous* and *Theme Park*, I'd then have to fully admit that I like the thought of Bullfrog games far more than the experience of playing them.
Expertise: Hating dark evenings when the clocks go back
Currently playing:
Sensible Soccer
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

LOADING...



As if you couldn't guess by this month's front cover, we're devoting a substantial chunk of this issue to the platform antics of a certain Donkey Kong.

Arguably the star that catapulted Nintendo into the big time, he's constantly played second fiddle to that moustached plumber, so we felt it was about time that the mighty simian was in the frame for a change. So turn to page 22, where you'll find a staggering ten-page article about the evolution of Nintendo's loveable ape. And if you're still hankering for some serious monkey loving, you may be pleased to hear that we have an in-depth feature of the SNES mega-hit *Donkey Kong Country* on page 68.

Granted, it's not the first time we've covered this particular title in Retro Gamer, but when you've got the gaming gods of Rare wanting to answer questions about the ape's 16-bit incarnation you don't really say no.

If you're not a fan of *Donkey Kong*, worry not, as we've still got plenty of retro goodness to enjoy, including: 'the making ofs' of *Rise Of The Robots, Diablo, Sensible Soccer* and *Colin McRae Rally*. There's a retroinspection on Atari's Lynx, the final part of our SSI interview and a behind-the-scenes look at Bullfrog, too.

And if you think that line-up sounds good, wait until you see what's planned for next issue.

Enjoy the magazine

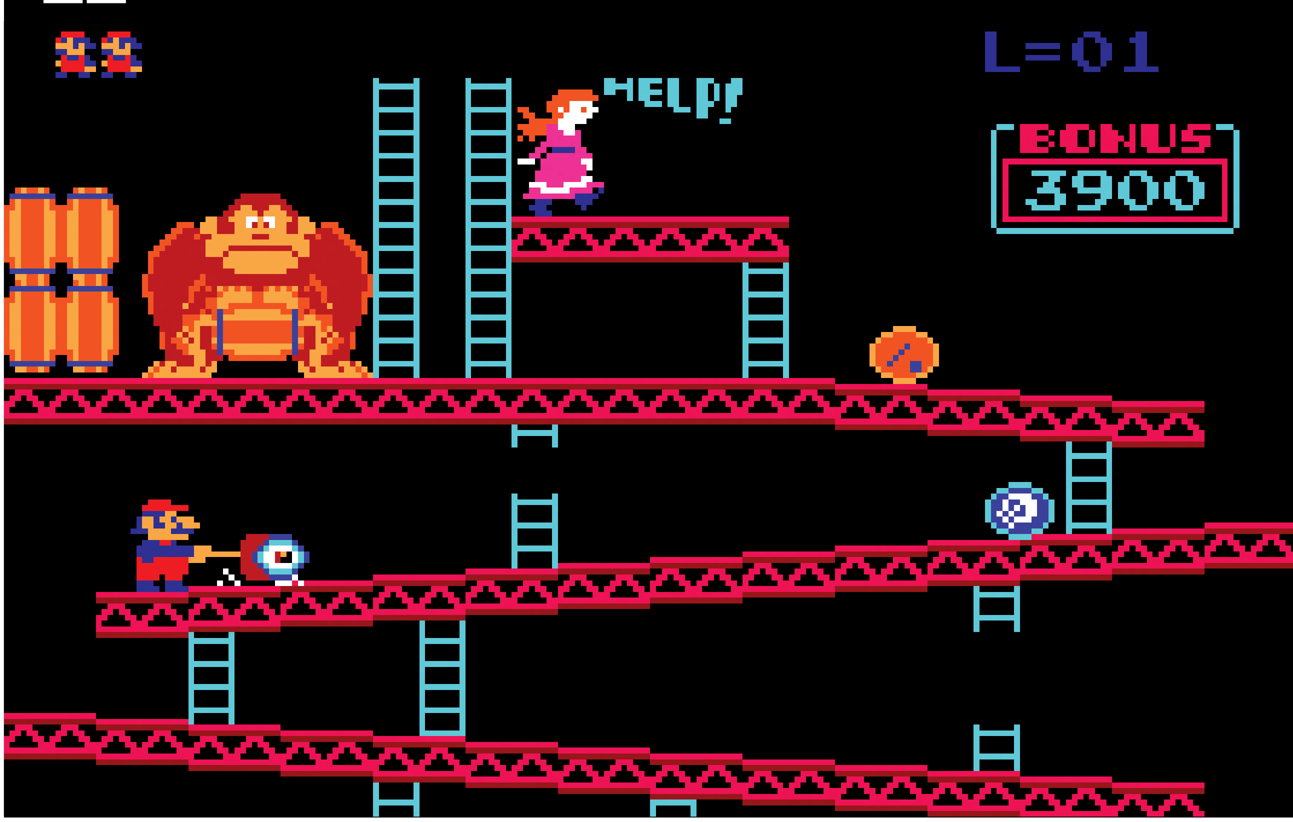






CONTENTS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES



INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…





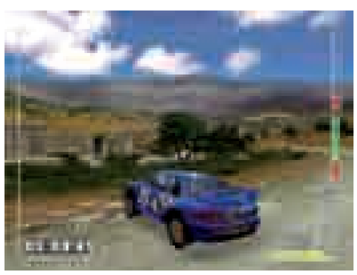


ESSENTIALS

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



THE MAKING OF...

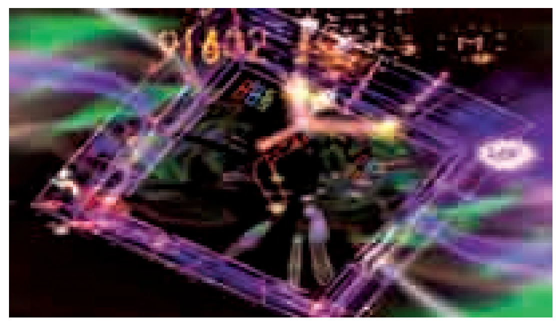


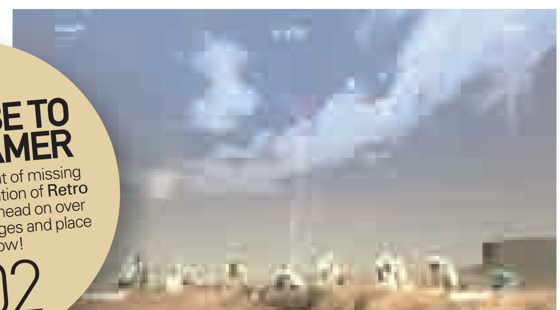
RETRO RATED

THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



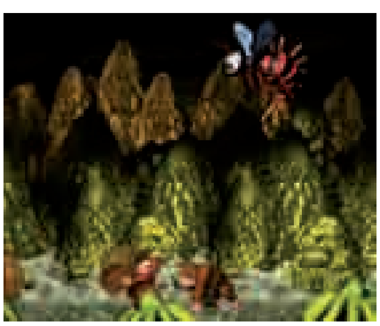




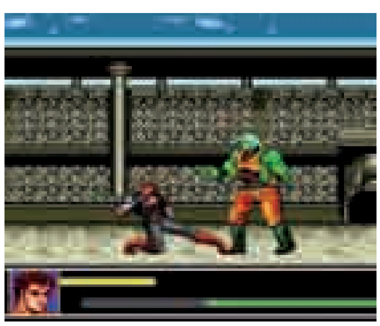
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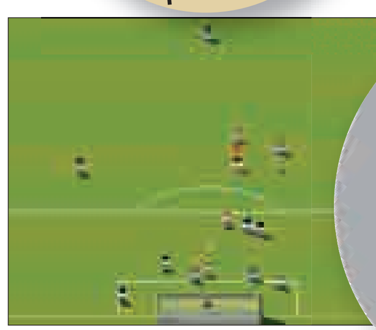
p102



THE MAKING OF...
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



RETRO SHAMER
LAST BATTLE



THE MAKING OF...
SENSIBLE SOCCER

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

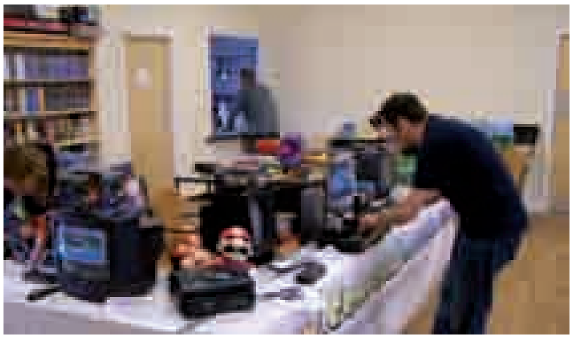
RETRO RADAR

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…

THE NOSTALGIC NORTH

ANTIQUE CONSOLES LINED THE WALLS AND TRAGICALLY AGEING GAMERS GATHERED TOGETHER TO REDISCOVER THEIR YOUTH AT RETRO NORTH



Andy from consolepassion.co.uk shirking his responsibilities and playing games on his own stall.



The man behind Retro North, Keith Lutener (aka Lorfarius).

An eclectic collection of surprisingly real people (who you assumed were sub-dimensional entities that phased in and out of existence when not posting on forums) materialised in the wilds of Derbyshire on 25 August and gravitated into genre-based cross sections of a prehistoric games market demographic. Spec-chums, C64-ers, SNES-o-trons, Mega Drivers, coin-operators and a couple of shunned and lonely Amstraddlers feigned interest in each other's lives while eyeing an alluring piece of hardware from across the room.

Organiser Lorfarius (Keith Lutener) told us what inspired him to host a classic gaming event. Remembering, this is Retro North and it's held in the north by a northerner, his answer isn't surprising. "A few pints down the local," laughs Keith. "I was looking to attend a retro event but there seemed to be so few in the pipeline. Those that there were all seemed to be based around London. Being up north made it quite a trek so I hit upon the idea of a more central location. Retro North was born."

Due to start at 11am, the venue was burning with vivid raster lighting by 10:15am. High scores were being set while systems were still being unloaded and 20-year-old knots of tangled wires were smoothed out and woven into a web of ageing technology. Many rarities saw daylight in the console conservatory of Glossop Rugby Club.

"Luckily, I had several of my own consoles lying in wait to fill the console section," says Keith. "However, as time went on I was surprised at how many pieces of equipment people were offering to bring. The console area was packed to the rafters and I was pleased about the range of systems from the past 25 years. Consoles and computers were easy to source, but trying to find 15-20 TVs was surprisingly difficult. Thankfully, the **Retro Gamer** forumites came through in the end."



Ste picked up three prizes in the Retro North raffle, including a Dreamcast, an **RG** compilation CD and a five quid off voucher.

The boys from Jamma+ brought a full-sized upright cabinet (introducing us to the thrilling *Salamander 2*) and several game boards, which they graciously swapped throughout the day. Boyo, (aka Chris Wilkins) brought a DigitalArcade.co.uk cocktail cabinet. And as a superb counterpoint to the nostalgic old-style machines, Witchfinder (of the **RG** forum) brought along a compact bar-top cabinet, which dozens of re-addicted arcade gamers were itching to get their cramped fingers on.

Enter gaming legend Ste Pickford, who, after heading straight for the bar, prepared for a Q&A session about his life in computer games. Although a faulty PA system conspired to silence his stories amid the awesome thunder of the arcade machines,



Simon from Cronosoft plays one of Jonathon Cauldwell's new Speccy games while the programmer watches on.

HERO OF THE MONTH



GUMBY

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of *Super Joe* memorable amnesiac.

First appearance: *Monty Python's Flying Circus*

Distinguishing features: Knotted hanky, willies and a prominent chin

Weapon of choice: Exploding cheese

Most likely to: Get squashed by the Allegory of Cupid's dismembered foot

Least likely to: Do something similar

Interesting fact: To provide the voice for Gumby in the game, Graham Chapman's body was exhumed and Terry Jones used his skull like a hand puppet while making silly noises

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 25: DARKSEED



Amiga's graphics unleashed the possibility for computerised artwork. Building a game around the collected works of HR Giger may sound like a bad idea, but the result was surprisingly good. *Darkseed* re-created the luscious and horrid bio-mechanics of Giger's fevered mind, providing a sinister realm for Amiga's maturing demographic.

JUST IN DARRAN'S FINALLY HAD A CHANCE TO PLAY NIGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS. AFTER WETTING HIMSELF WITH EXCITEMENT, HE THEN PRONOUNCED IT TO BE "THE BEST GAME EVER MADE".



Andy hard at work modding people's consoles so those awesome imports can be played on this side of the ocean.

Ste's exuberant personality permeated the event. Mingling with gamers and chatting to fans, he proved the star of the show and provided a superb professional link to the gaming scene that inspired Retro North. Caught signing copies of *180* by the Weekend Gamer camera crew, you're well advised to keep an eye on supporters of Retro North, www.weekend-gamer.co.uk for footage of both Ste and the event.

Andy at Console Passion offered an invaluable modding service with a smile for attendee's consoles while providing his special brand of one-man-show entertainment from behind the stall in the main venue. He also put together a three-page retro quiz (dominated by the cheating, drunken Retro Passion bastards – we love you really) and provided some awesome prizes from ConsolePassion.co.uk.

As seems to have become an admirable tradition for retro events, Retro North was held in aid of the Diabetes UK charity. "I've had diabetes for 25 years," explains Keith on his choice of beneficiary. "So it seemed a good idea to pick a charity that I knew something about. I'd like to thank our sponsors Console Passion and Retro Fusion – both were a great help and provided a considerable amount of sponsorship, and we managed to raise £517 for charity, which I'm very proud of.

RGCD, Cronosoft and Weekend Gamer TV helped to make the event much more with their stalls and various equipment and games on show. I'd also like to give a big thanks to everyone who brought equipment and games for the day as it just wouldn't have happened without so much input."

Charitable endeavours and event content aside, Retro North was a sell-out success because of the gamers. It might have been a small venue, but gathering together to share a few credits while putting faces to names is why we remember and love the games of yore so passionately, and as long as people like Keith continue to provide a forum of friendly celebration, these great games will never be forgotten.

"I'm currently looking into a much larger venue and trying to track down some elusive guests for next year, so watch this space," says Keith excitedly.

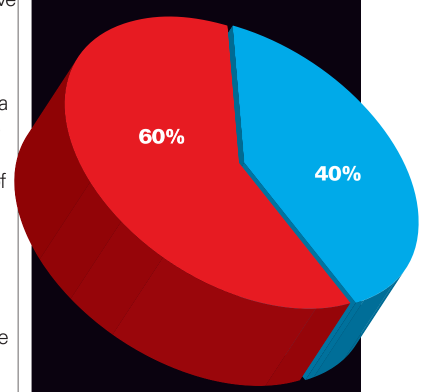
HOT TOPICS

DID YOU ENJOY YOUR VISIT TO THIS YEAR'S RETRO NORTH?

Yes, it was a brilliant day out, I had a magical time there **40%**

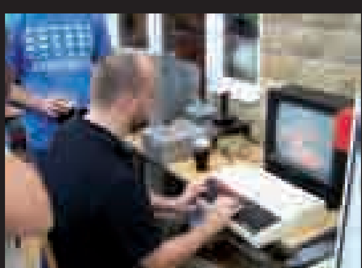
No, it was very disappointing and I shan't be returning **0%**

Unfortunately I was unable to attend this year but I did want to go to it **60%**



THIS MONTH WE'VE MOSTLY BEEN PLAYING...

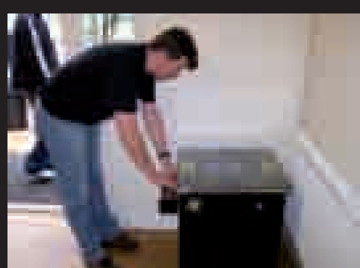
WITH SO MANY CLASSIC GAMES TO PLAY AT THIS YEAR'S CGE, THESE WERE THE ONES WE KEPT RETURNING TO



» Once the BBC Micro finally spluttered into action, so did Retro Gamer forumite markopoloman.

LAST NINJA

The BBC Micro was reluctant to actually work at all, but retro gamer's aren't known for giving up easily. Eventually, the BBC was tortured into loading *Last Ninja*, much to the delight (and surprise) of many gamers. *Markopoloman* going old-school (our school actually did have BBC Micros).



» Seeing games played the way mother nature intended, on the cocktail cab, as demonstrated by Retro Fusion's Boyo.

PHOENIX

I really wanted to put my beer down on Boyo's cocktail cabinet, but unfortunately the punters wouldn't move away from it for long enough. *Phoenix* was played for hours on end and served to remind a lot of gamers at Retro North how important it is to play games in their original format.



» Looking back at old games helps us to see where we've come from and where we're going in the future.

GUITAR HERO

Not exactly retro, but there are always a few current-gen consoles on standby at these events, and Retro North was no exception. *Guitar Hero* (along with *Super Mario Kart*) was never off the projector screen, and more than a few new axe men were discovered in the retro ranks.



» A surreal experience, *The Typing Of The Dead* is a thing best accompanied by ale.

THE TYPING OF THE DEAD

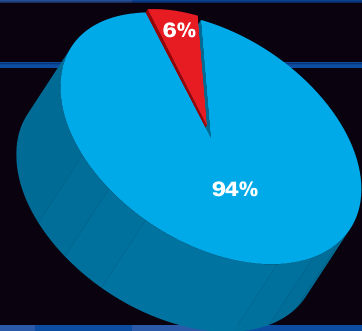
A new and bizarre concept to us, *The Typing Of The Dead* is a brilliant pastiche of Sega's awesome shooter, and proved a hit at Retro North. Typing words and phrases to kill zombies is a surprising amount of fun.

HOT TOPICS

ARE YOU PLEASED WITH THE HANABI DOWNLOADS?

Yes, it's about time we had games that actually run at 60 hertz **94%**

No, I don't like reading lots of Japanese text **6%**



WINDS OF CHANGE

IS NINTENDO RECONSIDERING ITS VIRTUAL CONSOLE CONTENT?

European Wii owners get a poor deal when it comes to Virtual Console releases. Plagued by 50Hz adaptations that lack the speed and full-screen abilities of their NTSC counterparts, gamers have grown to expect lacklustre conversions.

However, this may all be set to change as 14 September saw Nintendo release *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* and *Mario's Super Picross* on the popular download service. Both games were previously unavailable in the UK, and, in the case of *Mario's Super Picross*, sport huge amounts of Japanese text. But the glee continued when the following week saw the UK debuts of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Ninja Jajamaru Kun* for NES, while the SNES conversion of *Gradius III* and Treasure's *Sin And Punishment* arrived a week after that.



Darran's favourite N64 game is now available on the Virtual Console. And yes, it is better than *The Ocarina Of Time*.

Created to tie in with Japan's Hanabi Festival, this proves that Nintendo Europe's original download policies aren't as strict as we thought, and there's every chance that something similar will happen again. Perhaps the option to download 60Hz versions of our favourite games isn't far off.

Nintendo has also revealed the first set of Neo Geo titles heading to VC. All three are fighting games, and the initial trio consists of *Fatal Fury*, *World Heroes* and *Art Of Fighting*. No release dates have been given but the cost of 900 points is very welcome, especially considering how pricey Neo Geo titles are on the internet.

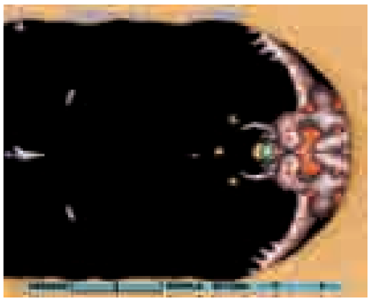
And in another move sure to please the hardcore, Nintendo has also stated that PC-Engine CD games will be heading to the download service. Unlike the Neo Geo announcement, there has been no mention of games, but we do know that they'll be available to download for 800 points (the same price as Mega Drive and SNES releases). Let's just hope that the likes of *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Lords Of Thunder* will all be made available in the first wave of releases.



Don't be put off by the Japanese text, *Mario Super Picross* is a thoroughly engaging puzzler.



Alright, so it's not really as good as *The Ocarina Of Time*, but it's still a damn fine game. Just look at it for goodness sake.



Gradius III, the shoot-'em-up game that manages to turn slowdown into an art form.

HEAR ME ROAR

NINTENDO DS TO RECEIVE DRAGON'S LAIR SEQUEL AND SPACE ACE?

Dirk the Daring is certainly being kept busy these days. After starring in the HD DVD release of *Dragon's Lair* (which, incidentally, looks very funky), he's now been given the green light for another brand new DS remake: *Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp*.

While very little information has been revealed about this particular sequel, we do know that it is being coded by the same development house – step forward, United Coders. This is also the team currently working on *Dragon's Lair DS*. So we are expecting this one to share several similar features.

United Coders has yet another Laser Disc project up its sleeve. It has also revealed that it will be working on a brand-new update of *Space Ace*. While not as popular as the *Dragon's Lair* games, *Space Ace* still did well enough to spawn a sequel. Again, there are no firm details at the moment, but if this doesn't include the arcade original and the brand-new Director's Cut that has been promised for *Dragon's Lair DS*, we'll be very, very surprised.



Dragon's Lair one isn't even out yet, but the sequel has already been announced.

THE retro GAMER OPINION

"At one stage of my life I played Level 5 of *Rez* every single day, for nine months solid. It's a phenomenal title that blends music, gameplay and imagery with digital brilliance. While it would be nice to see some extras, I'm well aware of Q Entertainment's love of high price tags. *Rez* is more than worth it."

Darran Jones

"*Rez* is one of Sega's greatest achievements, so it's fitting that it will be appearing on my favourite current gen console. Saying that though, I'm also interested to download *Every Extend Extra Extreme* and *Ikaruga*. If only to find out if they're as good as Darran constantly says they are."

Mike Tooley

"As someone determined not to buy from this generation of consoles, the Microsoft demons are now sitting on my shoulder, whispering, "You want to buy a 360. You can replace your Xbox and your Dreamcast." *Rez* is a particular lure – it's a beautiful game, and if you don't like it, you've got no soul."

Craig Grannell

"Xbox Live Arcade is leading the way when it comes to innovation and variation. With Sega's trippy blaster *Rez* and Treasure's prolific polarity-popper *Ikaruga* heading to the Microsoft server, and Darran informing me that Treasure is planning to port *Bangai-O* to DS, it marks a happy time for blaster fans."

Stuart Hunt

XBOX'S FINEST ACHIEVEMENT

IKARUGA AND REZ SHOOT UP THE MARKETPLACE

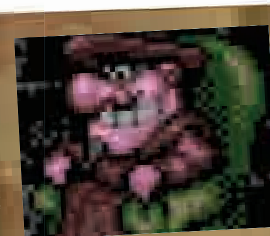


The two-dimensional shooter is a genre that has sadly waned since Dreamcast's demise. No longer do we find ourselves scouting importers for blasters with madcap obscure Japanese titles, with peculiar monikers like 'Gamma Radium 60+ Bullet Eater Alpha Germ Spree'. However, it seems one will emerge that tweaks the gameplay. With word of its excellence reaching our shores, it gets a limited release and owners later demand ridiculous sums of money on auctioning websites. The news then that two of history's finest examples – the two-tone shooter *Ikaruga* and Sega's beat-tastic blaster *Rez* – will be coming to Xbox Live Arcade had us very excited.

What's most thrilling is not just the prospect of playing these classics – and they are classics in every sense of the word – in lovely high definition and sumptuous 5.1 sound, it's also the fact that a number of extras are due to appear for each version.

And that's not all. Further announcements from Microsoft saw the shooters *Every Extend Extra Extreme*, *Omega Five*, *Triggerheart Exelica* and *Schizoid* being announced. So, may we suggest getting those trigger thumbs well prepped?

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



THE GRAND INQUISITOR

Without villains there would be no heroes. What would Batman be without The Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Utter rubbish – that's what

First Appearance: *The dioceses of Seville and Cordoba and The BBC (on the telly)*

Distinguishing Features: Comfy chair, no knotted hanky

Weapon of choice: A fanatical devotion to the pope

Most Likely to: Take you by surprise. And scare you.

Least Likely to: Make you confess

Unusual fact: To provide sound effects for the Amiga version, Michael Palin agreed to be tortured by Spanish clergy.

THAT'S JOUST CRAZY

BIG BIRD FINALLY GETS A MOVIE DEAL

Of all the cool videogame plots that exist, a big-budget Hollywood production company has decided that what cinemagoers are really pining for is a movie about medieval knights fighting on giant flying ostriches. Not that a *Joust* movie wouldn't be cool – far from it – but we're trying to wrap our heads around which A-list star would sign up for the part. An hour and a half of riding a giant buzzard is hardly a career-defining role. With an upcoming *Postal* movie from Uwe Boll and a *Castle Wolfenstein* film also in the works – written and directed by Roger Avary (*Killing Zoe, Rules Of Attraction*) – it seems Hollywood is running out of Adam Sandler comedies and Asian remakes and is further turning its attentions to videogames for inspiration.



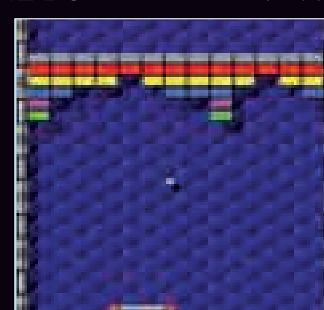
Rumours suggest that Bernie Clifton will make a cameo.

TAITO HEART DS

TAITO CLASSICS HIT THE DS

At this year's Tokyo Game Show, arcade legend Taito revealed a plethora of DS titles on its release schedule, and a few of these will be re-workings of arcade classics. *Space Invaders Extreme* (which our sources tell us is an extreme version of *Space Invaders*) and *Arkanoid DS* feature among the titles on the list. We're intrigued as to how well a stylus-controlled Vaus is going to handle, but luckily, Taito has confirmed that it will be shipping with a miniature paddle to ensure that the experience is as authentic as possible. *Arkanoid DS* is also rumoured to support online features, but we're guessing that's probably going to be used to compare high scores, as playing the role of a colourful static brick while your mate parries a small ball bearing at you is never enjoyable.

We can't wait for *Arkanoid*.



THE GALLERY

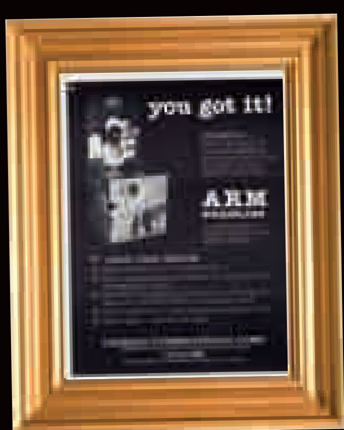
CLASSIC ADVERTS TO STIMULATE THE NOSTALGIA GLAND: THIS MONTH, WE LOOK AT THE GAMES THAT WERE AVAILABLE BEFORE VIDEOGAMES RULED



Sex Tester
Released: When love was free and sex was the new rock 'n' roll.
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? Incorporating a machine that tests your sexual prowess with a condom dispenser is like passing a breathalyser test and then being given a pint of vodka afterwards. Perhaps we've got this ad wrong? Judging by the two scantily clad mounds of flexing flesh on the scoreboard, maybe it's simply a device for determining what gender you are.
What's cool about it?: As far as the promotion of condom dispensing, sex-testing machines go, this flyer does the job with a pink panache.
What's naff about it?: Looking at it makes you feel like one of the kids from *Porky's*.
Trivia: Apparently, if you manage to reach the highest score on the board the two people on the display will come to life and conduct a heavy-petting session, before exploding into love hearts.



The Stripper
Released: It's older than *Bullseye*
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? This cheeky little ad, like its dartboard-holding female model, doesn't really give too much away. Notice that there's another part of the flyer – where it states that there are 'exciting details' above a faint purple arrow – which unfortunately we just couldn't print. To do so we would have had to include a free bar of soap to wash your eyes out with afterwards.
What's cool about it: It looks cool enough to frame, hang on your bedroom wall and invite your friends around for champagne and canapés to discuss its post-modernism.
What's naff about it: That large dartboard just keeps supplanting a strange image of Jim Bowen into our heads.
Trivia: Apparently, we've been reliably informed that the woman on the flyer isn't actually holding a dartboard, she was actually born half-lollipop.



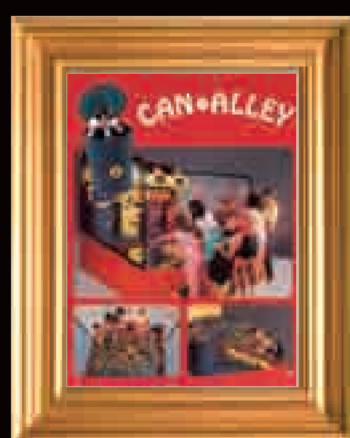
The Arm
Released: Older than Queensbury Rules.
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? It certainly looks mean and brawny. This black-and-white flyer has a luchadore poised for action. No messing this one, straight to your jugular with a thumb twist. We're confused as to why the bottom artwork shows two men blatantly fighting (surely that's not appropriate arm-wrestling protocol). And what's going on with that plastic embossed wrestler in the background, it looks like he's been put into the recovery position.
What's cool about it: The *Raging Bull* look, the fact it's shouting 'you got it!' but never elaborating on what that something actually is.
What's naff about it: There is nothing wrong with the ad; it's perfect in every way, shape and form.
Trivia: Despite its rather gangster-sounding moniker, the second game this ad refers to, 'Fanky Malloon', is a helium-balloon vending machine.



Chopper
Released: Before Prop Cycle
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? Well it looks very *Magical Mystery Tour*, and it proves Allied Leisure Industries cottoned onto the cycle-style cab years before Namco. Quite what the game is we're still not sure, though. It looks like an exercise bike that allows you to stare at a plastic toy. Well, rifling through its features for clarification simply gets you nowhere. It comes with a 'realistic gear shift, clutch, throttle and 'Xmas tree' start' whatever that's supposed to mean.
What's cool about it?: It doubles up as a rather handy torch.
What's naff about it: The massive word 'chopper' and those odd colourful explosions that are scaring away those rare pterodactyls.
Trivia: The chopper cycle was made popular by the 1969 Dennis Hopper film *Easy Rider*.



Lott-O-Help
Released: Before colour was invented
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? It might look like the world's most boring cash machine, but closer inspection reveals that the machine is actually a useful tool that helps you to pick six numbers. Perhaps that's actually a lot more complicated than it actually sounds, let's give it a go… 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 2… damn! If only we had Lott-O-Help to easily guide us through the life struggle that is random number selection.
What's cool about it: You can colour it in.
What's naff about it: This should have really been a picture of a private yacht bobbing in the Caribbean along with the words: 'Want this? Play this'.
Trivia: A biorhythm is an innate, cyclical biological process or function. The best example of this that we can think of is sleep… or perhaps watching *Big Brother*.



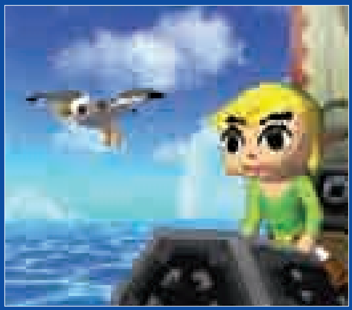
Can Alley
Released: 1993
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? Seriously, how could it not sell the game? You're throwing balls at cats and they're in dustbins. You only have to look at the excited face on 'thumbs-up kid' at the front of the flyer to realise that.
What's cool about it: Well, nothing at all really, unless of course you want to count that amazingly cool 'flock of seagulls' haircut that the blonde mum is sporting.
What's naff about it: The cringeworthy tight shorts that took Darran back to his school sports day. He hasn't stopped shaking.
Trivia: Bob's Space Racers is owned by the Cassata family and was founded in 1970. The company is still going strong today and makes such delights as *Dog Pounder, Bubble Up* and *Whac-A-Mole*.

RETRO GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING RETRO GAMER
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past, that doesn't mean there aren't any games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



OCTOBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

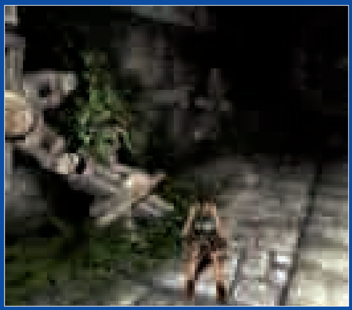
Released: 19 October

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

The Japanese version is out and has already recevied rave reviews, which is making us very excited. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's also set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities, allowing for some competitive play against other DS owners. Expect the definitive review next issue.



OCTOBER 07

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

Released: 26 October

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, PS2, PC, 360

Anniversary has already impressed us on the PS2 and PC, so hopes are high that the PSP and 360 versions will be just as good. Interestingly, this rejig of the original *Tomb Raider* will be available to download from the 360 Marketplace if you don't fancy trekking down to the shops and still have access to *Tomb Raider: Legends*.



OCTOBER 07

SONIC RIVALS 2

Released: 26 October

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

There's a plethora of games released on 26 October, so it's quite possible that a few will slip the notice of a lot gamers. We'll definitely be keeping an eye out for this sequel though, as we really quite enjoyed the original. Providing that Backbone Entertainment has corrected the various faults from the first game, this could well give *Sonic Rush Adventure* a run (ho-ho) for its money.



NOVEMBER 07

NiGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

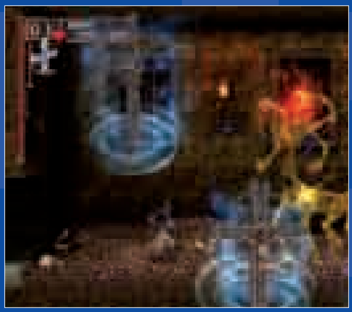
Released: 23 November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Ever since Sega revealed it was working on a new *NiGHTS* game, we've been like love-sick teenagers. The original Saturn game was superb, but never reached the audience it deserved, so hopes are high that the high install base for the Wii will more than make up for this. We've not had a chance to play it yet, but once we do you'll know all about it. We can't wait!



NOVEMBER 07

CASTLEVANIA: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES

Released: 23 November

Publisher: Konami

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

This is quite possibly the best *Castlevania* release of all time. Although it's not the main game we're excited about. No siree. It's the fact that Konami is bundling this update with the original versions of *Symphony Of The Night* and *Rondo Of Blood*. Both games are considered to be the best titles in the franchise, so to have both of them on the same disc is a bargain of epic proportions.



NOVEMBER 07

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Released: 23 November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii, DS

We waited years for Mario and Sonic to appear in a game together, but we never expected it to be a sports title. Still, now we're over our initial disappointment – surely Sonic will win every race? – we're actually looking forward to the duo's first game. If Sega is able to capture the magic of the likes of *Hyper Sports* and *California Games*, then this could well turn out to be a sleeper hit.



NOVEMBER 07

GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

Released: 30 November

Publisher: Sierra Entertainment

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii, DS

It's not often that we admit to being wrong (it's a policy Darran swears by), but it's become blatantly obvious to us that the Xbox Live version of *Geometry Wars* was actually far better than *Bankshot Billiards 2*. Anyway, now that's off our chests, we can start getting hyped for the impromptu sequel, which features more levels, more visuals and well… more everything really.



JANUARY 08

REZ

Released: January

Publisher: Sega

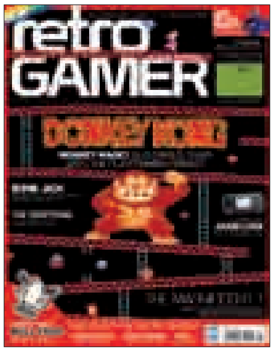
Price: 1200 Points (£10)

Format: Xbox Live Arcade

It's a little known fact that Sega's *Rez* is one of the greatest games ever made. Originally released on Sega's Dreamcast, it's a beautiful fusion of mesmerising sound and abstract visuals and is quite unlike any other on-rails shooter (think *Panzer Dragoon* on acid and you'll be getting close). Anyway, it's now been announced for Live Arcade so a new generation of gamers will be able to discover this fantastic title.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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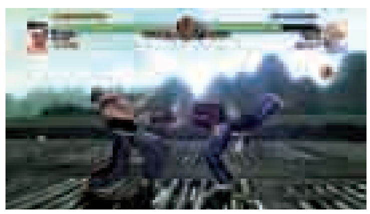
Email
retrogamer@
imagine-publishing.co.uk

STAR LETTER!

WHAT GOES AROUND…

Dear Retro Gamer,
Isn't the games industry really interesting at the moment? Games that we once thought would be forever lost to the Eighties and Nineties are now coming back with a vengeance (and in many cases a hi-def sheen). Shoot-'em-ups seem, once again, to be back in vogue (thanks, Microsoft), and companies like Sega and EA are going back to their roots and putting fun and innovation back into their products. People often say that clothing, music and movies constantly come back into fashion, and it would appear that the same thing is happening to videogames. I'll be first in line for when those virtual-reality machines are made available for the home.
Ben Brookes, Kent

You're right, Ben, many aspects of the industry appear to be coming full circle at the moment, and it's great to see games like Skate *and* Sega Rally *offering so much more than just fancy-looking visuals. Of course, it's not all good news – downloadable content on all three current-gen consoles is a little too expensive for our tastes – but it can only get better. Have a binder and t-shirt for your sharp observation.*


» Don't be fooled by all the high-end visuals, *Virtua Fighter 5* is pure old-school.

BRING BACK COVER TAPES

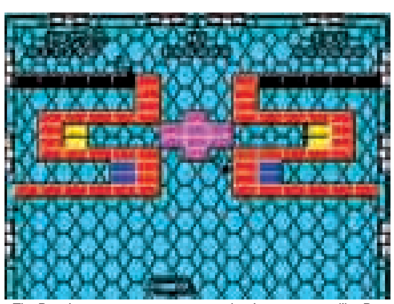
Dear Retro Gamer,
My first computer was a 48K Speccy so I like all that 8-bit rubbish. It's amazing how much code you can stuff in 48KB of RAM. *Jet Set Willy* and *Monty Mole* may be long in the tooth now, but they are still very good.

I would like to read something about cover tapes. You could cover some interesting games like *Krakout*, *Moley Christmas* and *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator.*
Kindest regards, The Boggit

That's a great idea, Boggit. Darran still has precious memories of the day he discovered Batty *on the cover of* Your Sinclair, *so there's no reason why we can't put something into motion. Watch this space, as they say.*

16-BIT ZERO

Dear Retro Gamer,
I was very angry when I read 16-bit Hero's rant about 8-bit games being rubbish on your letters page (issue 41). I guess that 16-bit Hero is just out of his teens and spent all his childhood playing '*Moronic The Hedgehog*'.


» The Boggit wants more coverage on classic cover tapes, like *Batty.*

Surely anyone can see that games like *Sabre Wulf*, *Head Over Heels* and *Impossible Mission* are timeless classics? People like 16-bit Hero don't deserve to call themselves gamers, as they are doing our hobby a great disservice. I just hope this letter gets printed so he can try the games I've mentioned, and hopefully, eat his evil little words.
Best wishes, 8-bit Forever

Well to be fair, 8-bit Forever, you've not exactly made a strong case for yourself with your little tirade. I think we're all going to have to accept that everyone has their own ideas as to what a good game is, and rather than all moan at each other and resort to name calling, we should just enjoy our hobby and stop worrying about what other people think of it. We'll be comparing ourselves in the showers next…

SCORE WARS

Dear Retro Gamer,
Why have you dropped review scores? I read through the mobile phones section in issue 41 and realised that there were no scores. I then checked a few previous issues and noticed that you've done a similar thing for your Virtual Console and Xbox Live Arcade reviews. Are

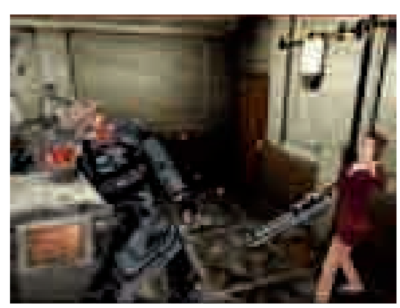

» We don't agree with 8-bit Forever's argument, but there's no denying he loves classic games.

you doing this to give the commercial reviews more relevance, or are you simply afraid of upsetting publishers with low scores?
Yours confused, Mark Bailey

The scores were dropped for several reasons, but not because of publisher pressure. There has also been some mention about this on the forum so we've decided to bring them back.

TIME TO HIT ANOTHER 100

Dear Retro Gamer,
You've been back for nearly two years now, so surely it's time for another poll to find out what the best games of all time are?


» We didn't give *Resident Evil: The Missions* a score, but if we did it would have been about 90%. Happy now?



EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** t-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…



FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE DONKEY KONG GAMES

ID: Heavy Stylus
Tetris. Ha! I beat Dudley to it!

ID: Scapegoat
The ColecoVision one. I played on it when I was 12, when it first came out, and I creamed my jeans.

ID: yogster
Donkey Kong 64, for the intro tune. I also quite liked the *DK Country* games on the SNES.

ID: CodenameMAT
For me it was *Kong* on the Spectrum, simply because a) it's the first version I played, b) I had no idea it was a blatant rip-off at the time and c)… Kong's tits.

ID: Sabreman
I was very attached to an old *Game & Watch Donkey Kong Jr*, as a kid. In fact, I never had much love for any of the other versions.

ID: TheDude18
Donkey Kong Jr. At last, Mario is found out as an animal hater. About time, after jumping on turtles for all these years!

ID: Cafeman
The original coin-op *Donkey Kong*. It is more challenging and deeper than ports to consoles, great yet simple gameplay and sounds you can't get out of your head. Why isn't it available on Wii VC?

ID: acharris05
It has to be *Donkey Kong Country 3* on the SNES.

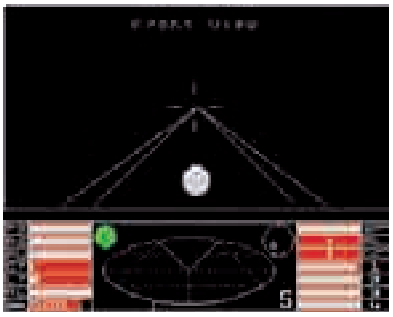
ID: Smurph
Mario Kart! That fat bastard was great in it.

ID: TheShend
Donkey Konga, a lovely, retro, 2D platformer, with an old-school score-attack element, but played with bongos! It may be for the fairly recent GameCube, but it's got the soul of a 16-bit platformer.

ID: Dizrythmia
I'm going with *Super Mario Kart*. Who is the greatest Mario bad guy? Bowser or Donkey Kong? I'd love to see them both go head-to-head with the plumber brothers… maybe I'm alone on that one…

I thoroughly enjoyed your recent article on platformers, but it would be brilliant if you did this on a far larger scale. Why not do an entire issue dedicated to a top 100? I'm sure the readers wouldn't mind and it would allow you to give each game plenty of coverage. Oh, and while you're at it, don't let the readers vote. I like to read **Retro Gamer** to find out the opinions of its staff, not its readership.
James Widdicombe, via email

You're right, James, maybe we should revisit the original top 100 that appeared back in the Live Publishing days. It would be interesting to see how a new list compared and we're sure readers would like to see it. We're not too sure about it taking up the entire magazine but it's certainly something that would need to be spread across a couple of issues, in order to do it the justice it deserves.

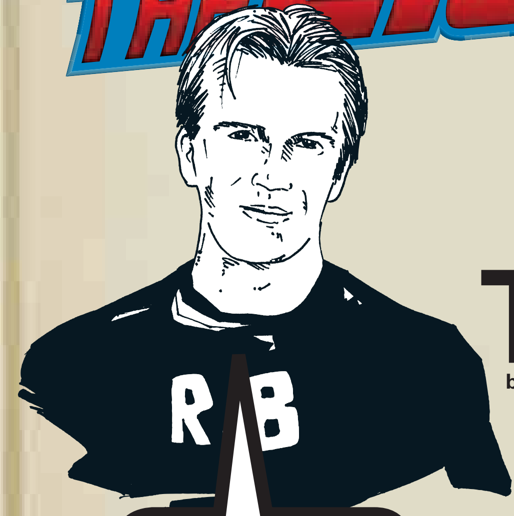


» Yes, we know it's not a BBC screenshot, but you had a whole issue of BBC goodness last issue.

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



November 1983 – the Ace is not so ace, Texas gives up, the Taiwanese invent Einstein, Oric Computing begins, Comx 35 ends and Commodore reveals the greatest piece of code ever written… ever (well, apparently). Richard Burton stifles laughter…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOV 1983

The makers of the Jupiter Ace went into receivership after poor sales. Launched in 1982 by Jupiter Cantab, the Ace was a silent, black and white Forth-driven machine. Steve Vickers and Richard Altwasser, who were the same guys responsible for designing the Spectrum, developed it. With a lack of software and the Spectrum becoming more affordable, sales of the Ace suffered badly and the inevitable decline followed.

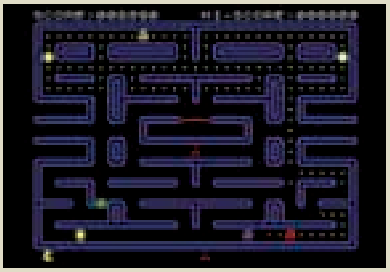
Atari was keen to branch out into other areas after suffering some major financial difficulties during the year, so it formed a new software division called Atarisoft. This division would concentrate on releasing many of the company's biggest games onto other formats. Among the classic titles to get the conversion treatment were *Pac-Man*, *Centipede*, *Robotron* and *Dig Dug*. Although this was widely seen as a positive move for the industry and Atari, its pricing structure left many gamers scratching their heads and hiding their wallets.

It was revealed that Atari's new games, for machines like the Spectrum and BBC, would cost £14.95. The first being *Pac-Man* for the Spectrum, due out in November. Carts for the C64 and VIC-20 were priced at around £29.95. With existing games on tape costing about £5.95 and Commodore cartridge games priced at approximately £10, Atarisoft may have shot itself in the foot before a game was even released.



» The Jupiter Ace – not from Jupiter and not that ace. Lack of software and falling prices signalled the end.





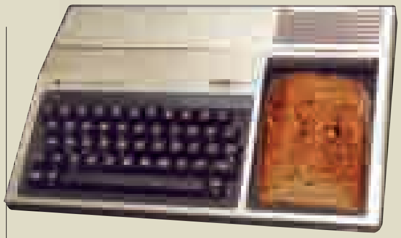
» Atari released software for other machines and overpriced its wares severely. Were the money problems *that* bad at Atari?

Accompanying the news of the game releases was the announcement that its newest machine, the Atari 600XL, would be hitting the shops in the UK soon. It was priced at £159 and considered a direct replacement for the Atari 400. An 800XL, set to supersede the standard 800, would also be released by the end of the month priced at £250.

Just a week after Texas Instruments announced it would not be upgrading or replacing its aged TI-99/4a computer, the company decided to completely withdraw from the home computer market. Production of the TI-99/4a would cease immediately, with the development of new products also being halted. The machine never gained a foothold in the UK, although it did attain relative success in the US. Dreadful financial figures were to blame, with a loss of $110.8 million in its third quarter. If nothing else, Texas Instruments was certainly giving Atari a run for its money in the haemorrhaging money stakes.



» A lot was resting on the Atari 600XL and its bigger brother, the 800XL – they were Atari's financial rescue package.



» The TI-99/4a was ceasing production. Luckily the cartridge slot could also double as a toast warmer. Now that's future-proof…

A Taiwanese company announced plans to launch a brand-new machine that, refreshingly, would be designed and built in Britain. The machine would feature a full-stroke keyboard, 64K RAM, colour monitor and a three-inch disk drive with its official launch planned for early 1984. Tatung and its new machine, the Einstein, appeared to have a computer with the 'oomph' to take on most of the existing systems. Still, priced at the eyebrow-raising price tag of £499, it could also be considered a tad pricey for the casual gamer.

The Comx 35 computer from Hong Kong was attempting to infiltrate the UK market with its low-cost games machine (with no games available at the time). Unfortunately, it seemed to have the shelf life of a custard cream. UK distributors found that so many of the computers were being sent back due to faults, that they decided to stop sales of the



» The Tatung Einstein: A great heap of a machine, but surprisingly good to use. It could emulate the Spectrum, too.

1983

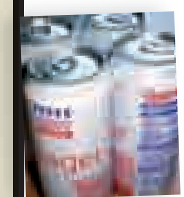


» Not only did the thieves steal the bullion, they also pinched the manager's biscuits. However, they carelessly dropped a few on the way out.

NOVEMBER NEWS

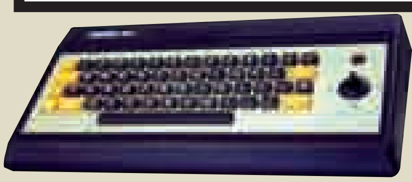
26 November saw the UK's biggest robbery when £25 million in gold bullion was stolen from Heathrow Airport. 6,800 gold bars, weighing in at around three tons, were taken along with hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds while they were being stored at the Brinks Mat warehouse. Despite the £2 million reward for information, and the fact that the gold bars were all marked with refiner's stamps, most of the gold has never resurfaced. Even with the ongoing investigations, only three people were jailed for their part in the Brinks Mat robbery. Police speculation suggested that as many as 12 other individuals were involved.

On 16 November, there was another unhappy episode in English football as fans rampaged in Luxembourg. This was after the England team had failed to qualify for the 1984 European Championships. Even though they beat Luxembourg 4-0 on the night, other scores went against them, which led to elimination… and subsequently, violence. Drunkenness, fighting, pilfering and, in most cases, a subtle blend of all three, led to over 50 fans being arrested. It started after the final whistle, with fighting in the stadium, which later spilt out into the city centre where cars were overturned and windows smashed. Not a great day for England – on or off the pitch.



» Refreshes the parts other beers cannot reach… unless you're cleaning your drains, in which case it's great for shifting crud.

9 November saw Alfred Heineken, beer magnate and brewer of tasty cold beverages, kidnapped along with his chauffeur. A ransom of 35 million guilders (16 million euros) was paid and they were safely returned after 21 days in captivity. The kidnappers were later caught, so that was nice. Beers all round?



» It was unreliable, but things could've been worse, it might not have had any software… Wait a sec, *software*, you say?

machine. It was later discovered that the Comx 35 had a failure rate of 55 per cent. That actually made Clive Sinclair's early Spectrums seem positively reliable…

Commodore boisterously claimed it had "the most amazing piece of software in the world" and was ready to release it on the unsuspecting public. If you were expecting something that would cause you to have a life-changing experience then you would have been bitterly disappointed. The epoch-shattering piece of code was *International Soccer* – yes, yes, we know – and it was due to be released before Christmas on cartridge.

While many deemed it a rarity that Sinclair Research had managed to deliver one of its products on time, after months of speculation about its appearance the Sinclair flat-screen pocket TV was unveiled. It measured five by three inches, had a two-inch black and white screen and ran off a six-volt Polaroid lithium power pack, all for just £79.99.

For those who love nothing better than going west, east, east, inventory, north and south-east, a new magazine for adventure-game enthusiasts made its first appearance this month. *Micro Adventurer* covered everything adventure related, with the help of long-time aficionado Tony Bridge. Despite the fact that the magazine was very informative and a great read, it suffered because it covered a small, specialist area in a niche market. It did incredibly well to last 17 issues.

Another new publication launched this month was *Oric Computing*. The Oric-1 was somewhat underrated and it never really collected the fan base that other systems had in the UK. Regardless of that fact, with blinding optimism, Oric Computing was born. It was never the most exciting magazine in the world, nor claimed to be, dedicating most of its space to type-in programs. Despite a somewhat heroic effort, five issues later it was dead.

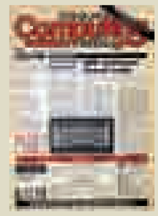
Parker Brothers announced some interesting titles for release over the forthcoming months, which included several licensed titles. The console game developer's autumnal portfolio featured two new *Star Wars* games, *Popeye*, *Lord Of The Rings* and *Spider-Man*. Although primarily targeting the Atari 2600, versions of those games would also be released on ColecoVision and Philips G7000 Videopac.

The *CVG* reviews section delved into an interesting cross-section of console formats, including: *Donkey Kong Jr* (Nintendo, ColecoVision), *Battlezone* (Atari, Atari 2600), *Q*Bert* (Parker Brothers, ColecoVision) and *Happy Trails* (Activision, Intellivision).

For the computer owners there was: *Multitron* (Sumlock, VIC-20), *Donkey Kong* (Severn Software, Oric-1), *Frogger* (Microdeal, Dragon 32) and *Tranz Am* (Ultimate, Spectrum).

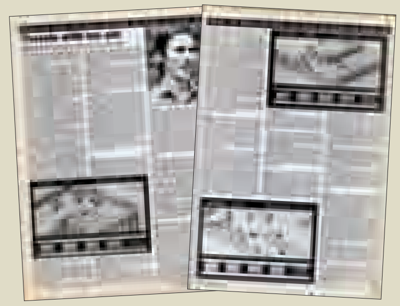
Sinclair User magazine had a small band of games on review this month covering *Hard Cheese* and *Road Toad* (both DK'Tronics), Vortex (JK Greye), *Galaxy Attack* (Sunshine Books) and *Styx* (Bug Byte). All in all it's a very average set of games. The software houses must be keeping the good stuff back for the Christmas sales push and Santa's sack…

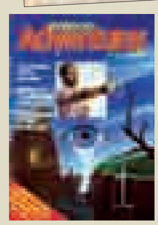
THIS MONTH IN…



Popular Computing Weekly

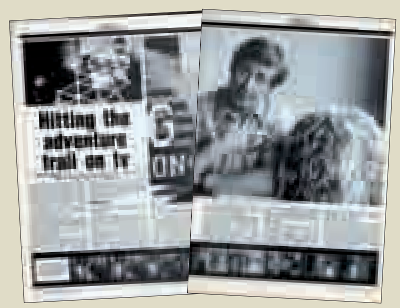
Quicksilva was a popular topic for features in the computing press this month. Even the weekly magazines, such as *Popular Computing Weekly*, got in on the act. It featured an interesting interview with Sandy White, creator of Quicksilva's enormous hit *3D Ant Attack*.

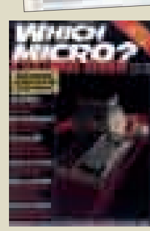




Micro Adventurer

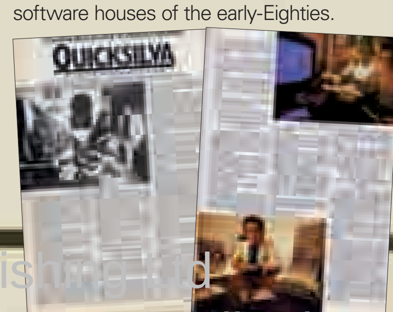
With its first issue out this month, *Micro Adventurer* aimed to please as many adventure fans as possible. It could explain the interesting interview with the creators of *The Adventure Game*, which featured the fantastically hi-tech BBC Micro-generated *Vortex*. Gronda.





Which Micro? & Software Review

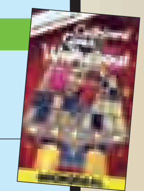
To prove that software houses do exist outside Merseyside, *Which Micro?* interviewed some guys at Quicksilva, including Mark Eyles and Rod Cousins. After starting small, Quicksilva built itself into one of the leading software houses of the early-Eighties.



CHARTS

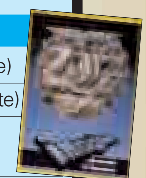
NOV 1983

DRAGON 32



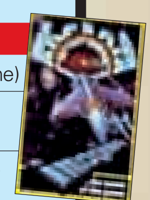
1 Cuthbert Goes Walkabout (Microdeal)
2 Night Flight (Salamander)
3 Ring Of Darkness (Wintersoft)
4 Space War (Microdeal)
5 Champions (Peaksoft)

SPECTRUM



1 Zzoom (Imagine)
2 Jet Pac (Ultimate)
3 Manic Miner (Bug Byte)
4 Tranz Am (Ultimate)
5 Flight Simulation (Sinclair/Psion)

VIC-20



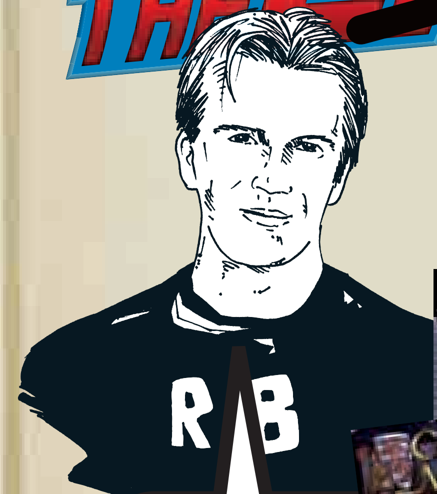
1 Arcadia (Imagine)
2 Gridrunner (Llamasoft)
3 Wacky Waiters (Imagine)
4 Skyhawk (Quicksilva)
5 Anti-Matter Splatter (Rabbit Software)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART NOV '83

1 Uptown Girl (Billy Joel)
2 All Night Long (Lionel Ritchie)
3 Say Say Say (Paul McCartney & Michael Jackson)
4 Cry Just A Little Bit (Shakin' Stevens)
5 Puss 'N Boots (Adam & The Ants)

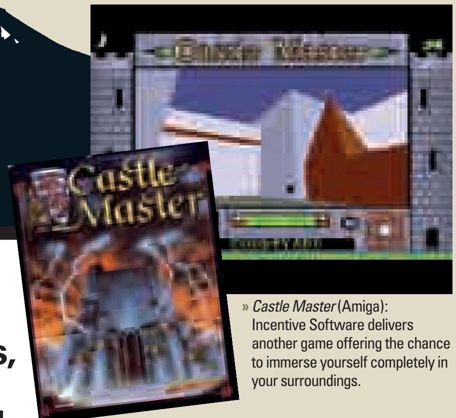


BACK TO THE ~~EIGHTIES~~ 90s



THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1990

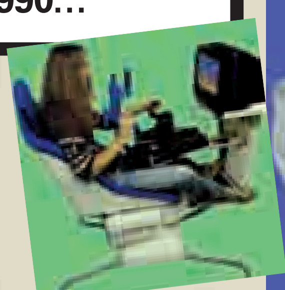
Konix conks out again, Loom looms, Rainbow Islands finally gets a home, as does RoboCop 2. And there's an incentive for Incentive when Freescape gets on TV. Richard Burton realigns his aerial to February 1990…



» *Castle Master* (Amiga): Incentive Software delivers another game offering the chance to immerse yourself completely in your surroundings.

Incentive Software, creator of the Freescape 3D gaming engine, decided to call it a day as an independent software house to focus on game design and development. Its first title, *Castle Master*, used an enhanced version of Freescape and was due out a few months later on Amiga and ST.

Incentive had also found another use for Freescape. *The Satellite Game* was a new children's TV game show made by Broadsword, the maker of *Knightmare*. Several graphical sequences were produced with Freescape, which was suited to the free-roaming style of the arcade adventure programme. *The Satellite Game* was broadcast on new satellite channel BSB, which used the squarial aerial.





» **Left:** Some hairy bloke with a plastic gun demonstrates the Konix power chair. Make war, not love. Kill 'em, kill 'em all… **Right:** The Konix Multi System, a great idea that went horribly wrong due to a lack of money. Shame.



» *Mutant Camels '89* (Konix Multi System): One of the games that was finished and ready for release on the infamous KMS.

Another firm taking an existing software house under its corporate wing was Virgin Mastertronic. From this point, the company looked after the gaming output of Magnetic Scrolls, creator of many a graphic adventure including *The Guild Of Thieves* and *Jinxter*.

Commodore and Atari locked horns over UK retail figures when Commodore celebrated the sale of 200,000 Amigas. Not one to miss an opportunity, Atari pointed out that the sales were to distributors not users. Commodore didn't respond, which made Atari look a bit silly.

Further news of the Konix Multi System console, already massively overdue, filtered through to the press with the revelation that it would suffer further delays. Konix, purveyor of fine joysticks for many years, decided to embark on a project to release a console that could morph into various forms, from aircraft yoke to steering wheel to motorbike handlebars – the console could do them all.

The machine planned a 256K RAM along with a 3.5-inch disk drive and there were also plans for enhanced control features, such as the 'power chair'. Perhaps not as exciting as playing *Space Harrier* in a hydraulic cabinet, but it still held promise. The console was originally due for release in summer 1989, but that changed to Easter 1990 with a proposed price tag of £229. Although software development for the machine was up to speed (apparently) with the help of Llamasoft's Jeff Minter who had an updated version of *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* ready, hardware production was behind schedule. Sadly, for gamers and Konix, the console never saw the light of day. Konix didn't have the resources to get the machine released and the costs of getting it as far as it did sent the company into liquidation.

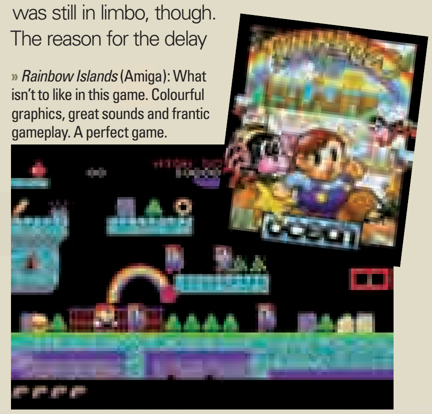


» *Loom* (Amiga): Lucasfilm's point-and-click adventure is superb on every count, with luscious graphics and a brilliantly atmospheric story.

Lucasfilm Games was set to release its latest offering, the eagerly awaited point-and-click adventure *Loom*. With the PC version already available and receiving rave reviews, the highly anticipated Amiga and ST versions were scheduled for the coming month.

Loom follows the story of Bobbin Threadbare, a young man who has been cast out from the Guild of Weavers by the Elders. The Elders are attacked and turned into swans, and that's where your adventure begins. Bobbin has to unravel the mysteries of the island with the help of his magical flute and the Book of Patterns while trying to find the swans to restore order to the island. *Loom* was a classic point-and-click made even better by the atmospheric soundtrack which accompanied the game.

Rainbow Islands, the sequel to *Bubble Bobble* was finally on the brink of a release. The Taito game, which had been converted for both Amiga and ST by Graftgold, had been completed several months previously. Sadly, it was still in limbo, though. The reason for the delay



» *Rainbow Islands* (Amiga): What isn't to like in this game. Colourful graphics, great sounds and frantic gameplay. A perfect game.

1990

FEBRUARY NEWS



» After years of incarceration, Nelson Mandela holds his Master System aloft, relieved to be able to play *Fantasy Zone* once again.

2 February saw a historic day in South Africa. President, FW De Klerk, lifted the 30-year ban on the African National Congress (ANC), the anti-apartheid group. In a televised address to the nation, he also stated he would release Nelson Mandela as soon as possible, although a date was not set. Many remained sceptical about his potential release.

On 11 February, Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid campaigner, Deputy President of the ANC and political prisoner was freed from jail after serving 27 years for treason and sabotage. Mandela appeared at the gates of the Victor Verster prison in Paarl with his wife, Winnie, on the day of his release. Most of his jail term was spent at the prison on Robben Island, off Cape Town.

7 February saw the beginning of the end for the USSR. The Soviet Communist Party agreed to relinquish its monopoly of power over the USSR's individual republics. Each country rebelled against Moscow by refusing to recognise Soviet laws, reaffirming their own local laws and promoting their economies. Although Central Government tried to reassert power on the republics, particularly the Baltic States, USSR's power base had been irreversibly undermined. A month later, Lithuania, the first of the Baltic States, declared independence. The Soviet Union pressurised Lithuania with economic sanctions and kept a large military presence in the country, which led to clashes. This further weakened the USSR's position. By the end of 1990 the USSR had been dissolved and Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president. He was no longer seen on *Spitting Image*.



» Mikhail Gorbachev liked nothing better than a game of *Missile Command* on his Atari 2600 Heavy Sixer.

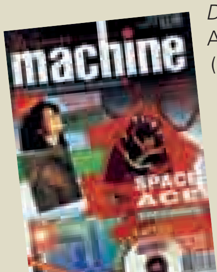
was that the publisher details were not finalised. Firebird was considered for the role of publisher, but after some nifty monetary negotiations, Ocean Software triumphed. This meant preparations were underway to get the title in shops within the next month. It's arguably one of the best games ever released on the Amiga, so it was worth the wait.

Ocean was in yet another battle to win the rights to another title, *RoboCop 2*. Having produced a commercial success with the original *RoboCop* game, Ocean was favourite although not an automatic choice for publishing the sought-after movie tie-in. Among the other interested parties were Elite and Activision, both with a history of producing quality movie and TV-associated software. However, it was Ocean that managed it in the end.

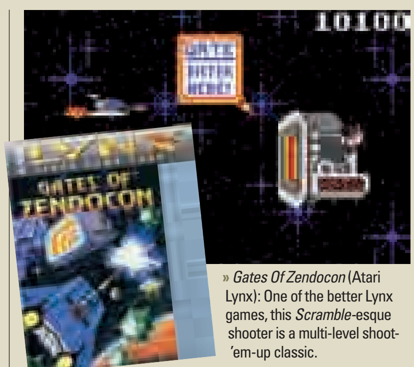
Whether it was consoles or computers, the shelves at the newsagents were bowing with the weight of multi-format magazines.

Newsfield's magazine, *The Games Machine*, gave top-rated games its Star Player award. Among the best of the bunch were *A-10 Tank Killer* and *David Wolf: Secret Agent* (both Dynamix, PC), *Budokan: The Martial Spirit* (Electronic Arts, PC), *Gates Of Zendocon* (Epyx, Atari Lynx), *Space Ace* (Readysoft, Amiga), *Drakkhen* (Infogrames, Amiga) and *X-Out* (Rainbow Arts, Amiga).

Over at *Mean Machines*, the team gave its coveted Mega Game status to



» Newsfield's *The Games Machine* had an 'exclusive' feature on Readysoft's *Space Ace*. Unfortunately, so did every other magazine…



» *Gates Of Zendocon* (Atari Lynx): One of the better Lynx games, this *Scramble*-esque shooter is a multi-level shoot-'em-up classic.

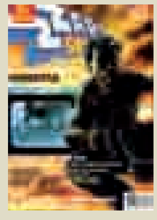
Castle Of Illusion (Sega, Mega Drive) with *Speedball* (Mirrorsoft, Master System), *Gremlins: The New Batch* (Nintendo, NES), *ESWAT* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Dr Mario* (Nintendo, NES) and *Crackdown* (Sega, Mega Drive) all realising high review percentages.

Zero magazine had its own award for top-rating games: the Zero Hero. Catchy. The cream of the crop for home computers this month included *Their Finest Hour* (LucasArts, Amiga/ST), *X-Out* (Rainbow Arts, Amiga), *Chaos Strikes Back* (FTL, ST) while in the console section the Console Classic badge of honour was firmly glued to *Thunder Force II* (Technosoft, Mega Drive).

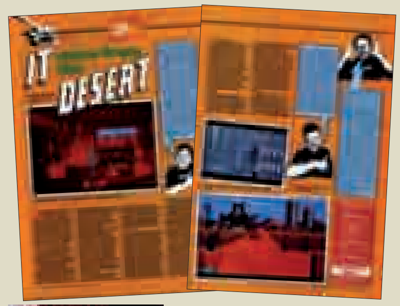
Computer & Video Games, on issue 99, felt particularly generous when reviewing the console games this month. Almost every title received a *C&VG* Hit 'seal of approval'. The cartridges packing a punch were *Mega Man* (Nintendo, NES), *Track & Field II* (Nintendo, NES), *Mr Heli* (Irem, PC-Engine), *Cobra Triangle* (Nintendo, NES), *Forgotten Worlds* (Sega, Mega Drive) and *Super Shinobi* (Sega, Mega Drive).

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

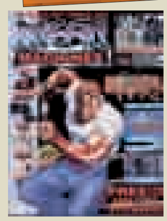
Zzap!



Even though it was the Nineties, *Zzap!* was still plugging away with several pages dedicated to Amiga. There were plenty of Amiga reviews, but the only one to come out with a Zzap! Sizzler was *It Came From The Desert* by Mirrorsoft/Cinemaware, the B-movie-style game about giant mutant ants. *Ant Attack* for the next gen, if you will…



MEAN MACHINES



Mr Rignall took a look at the first games to be available on the Super Famicom, which were available in the UK only on import at the time. Fancy one for £300? The first wave of games for the machine included *Super Mario World* and the super-fast racer, *F-Zero*.



THE ONE



The One ran a feature on *The Satellite Game*, a new arcade-adventure TV programme from the creator of *Knightmare*. The show would use graphics using Incentive's Freescape engine with static backgrounds painted by fantasy artist David Rowe, who was also responsible for several Quicksilva game inlays, including *Ant Attack*.



FEB 1990

AMIGA



1. Future Wars (Delphine/Palace)
2. Extra Time (Anco)
3. Chase HQ (Ocean)
4. Hard Drivin' (Domark)
5. Sim City (Infogrames)

ATARI ST



1. Chaos Strikes Back (FTL/Mirrorsoft)
2. Future Wars (Delphine/Palace)
3. Fighter Bomber (Activision)
4. Chase HQ (Ocean)
5. Hard Drivin' (Domark)

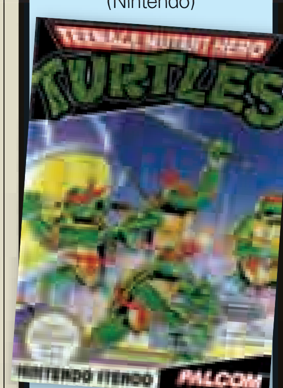
SEGA MASTER SYSTEM



1. Golden Axe (Sega)
2. Wonderboy 3 (Sega)
3. Ninja (Sega)
4. Chase HQ (Sega/Taito)
5. Hard Drivin' (Domark)

NINTENDO NES

1. Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles (Nintendo)
2. Double Dragon (Nintendo)
3. Super Mario 2 (Nintendo)
4. Batman (Nintendo)
5. The Legend Of Zelda (Nintendo)

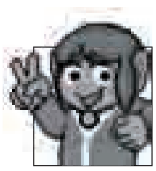


BIONIC COMMANDO

ARM-Y OF ONE



» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

I remember the first time I played *Bionic Commando* on my Amstrad, and admittedly, I wasn't a fan. I wasn't sure that removing the jumping aspect from a platform game and replacing it with a clunky winch-arm was a good call by Capcom.

Bionic Commando was a side-scrolling platformer with a difference – your protagonist couldn't actually jump (well, he probably could, but Capcom just wouldn't allow it). To progress, he had an extractable grappling-arm that allowed him to cling to ceilings and swing from platforms, like a militant Tarzan.

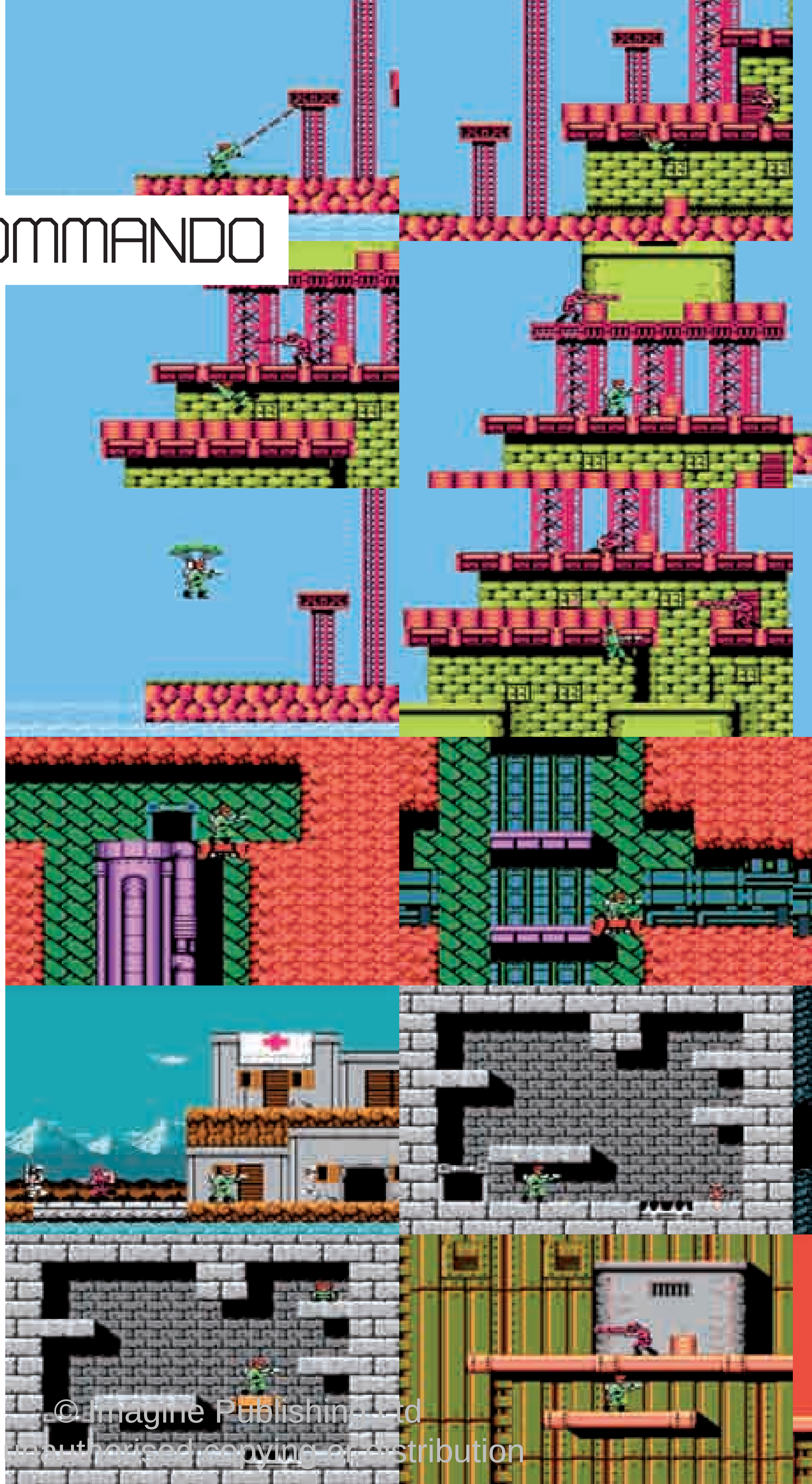
A few years later, I rediscovered the game on the NES at a car-boot sale. It was initially murder to get going, requiring a tiring five-minute cleaning session, but when I eventually got the thing to play I was pleasantly surprised at how different it was to how I remembered it.

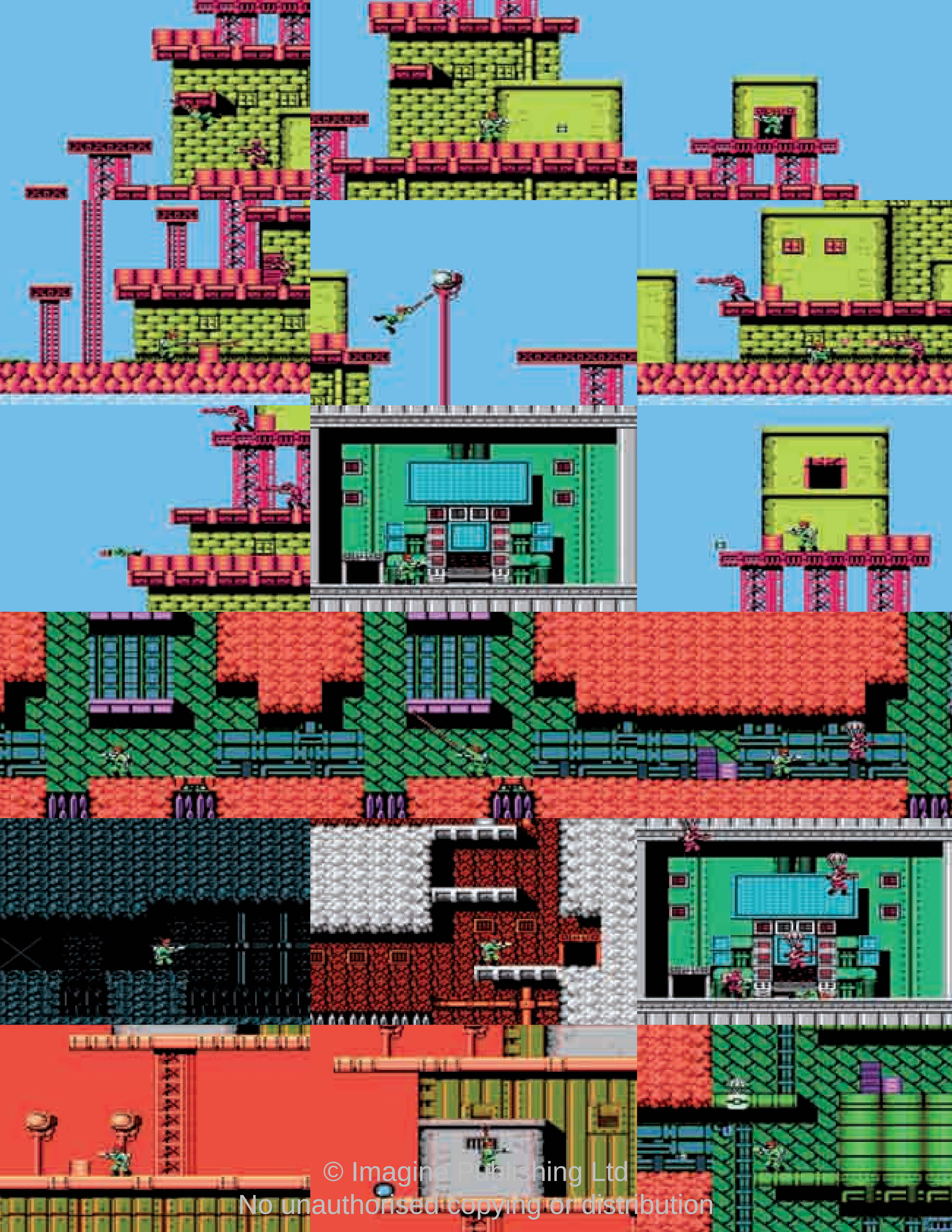
The vibrantly animated sprites combined with the game's depth and complexity, made you feel like a grown-up just by playing it. It felt like a completely different game… basically, because it was.

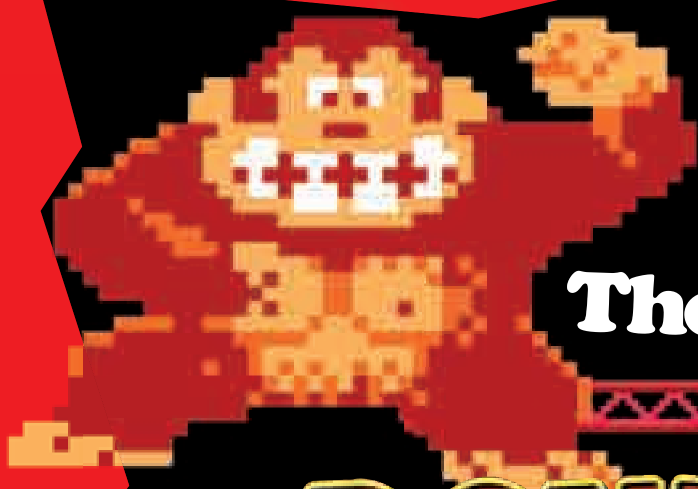
The early ports of *Bionic Commando* were lifted straight from its annoyingly hard-going arcade version. It wasn't a success, heck, it wasn't even a great game, and Capcom realised this. So for its NES conversion it gave the game a complete overhaul. It changed the story, the levels and gave it a new fiery-haired protagonist.

This time you were sent on a daring rescue mission to bring home the original Bionic Commando, Super Joe, who had gone MIA at the hands of the evil Generalissimo Kilt and his Nazi-plagiarising militia. The game was still tougher than an iron cockroach (as is the case with most Capcom games), but by tweaking the bionic arm so that it fired at a 45-degree angle, as opposed to straight in front of you, it became a more intuitive platform game.

So, by doing its own thing, *Bionic Commando* quickly went from being one of my worst to one of my favourite arcade ports ever made. And for that Capcom, I shake your hand… no, the other one.



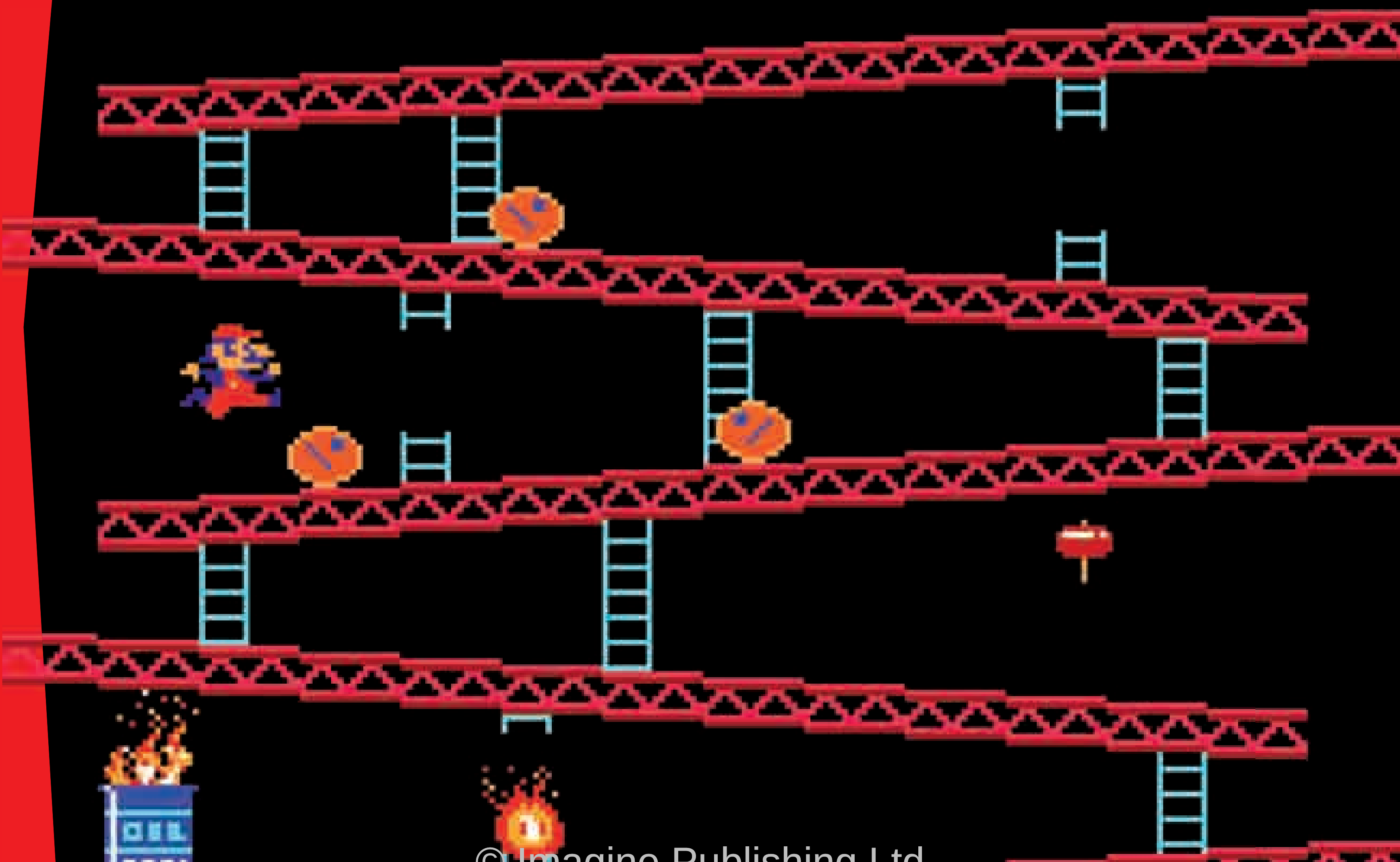




The history of…

DONKEY KONG

The portly plumber may have edged into mascot status for Nintendo, but Donkey Kong has always proved the resilient gaming-grunt, who could be called upon to pull off a victory when it mattered most. Stuart Hunt takes a look at the videogame's misread simian and Nintendo's hairy knight





Donkey Kong A-Z

Remember that entire series of *Dallas* that was controversially wiped away when the show's producers brought Bobby Ewing back to life? They explained his lack of rigor mortis was due to a long, drawn-out dream sequence by his hyper-imaginative wife. Consequently, all story, plot threads and character development that had stemmed from his untimely death were made redundant, and its viewers were left understandably miffed by the revelation.

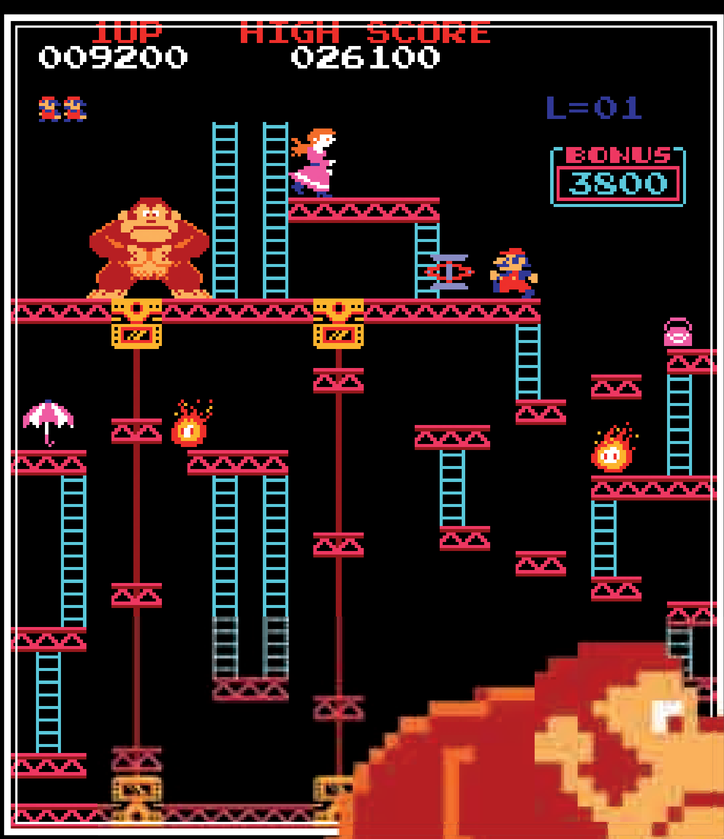
Okay, we digress, but like the *Dallas* scriptwriters, Nintendo has also been known to skip over the facts and move the goalposts on the odd occasion. It certainly feels like there's a pivotal link missing from its IP lineage, a lost game that never found a release; one that chronicled Mario's transition from an evil carpenter to a heroic plumber and explaining how Donkey Kong went from being a villainous ape to a loveable 20-foot beanie baby.

As confusing as this story eventually became, looking to the early days of *Donkey Kong*'s development for an anchor, instead tosses you an early arcade cab called *Radar Scope*. It was this very early *Space Invaders* clone that would trigger *Donkey Kong*'s genesis.

The Eighties shooter from Nintendo proved a big hit in its Eastern homeland and as a result, the then-president of Nintendo of America, Minoru Arakawa, happily agreed to place a considerable order for the machine to be distributed in America. As fate would have it, by the time *Radar Scope* touched down on American soil the buzz surrounding the game had waned considerably. US arcade operators were furious by the lack of earnings from the machine and aimed their anger towards Arakawa.

Facing financial ruin, Arakawa pleaded with his father-in-law (Nintendo CEO Hiroshi Yamauchi) to send him a new game that he could install into the *Radar Scope* cabinets and turn his ill fortune around. Yamauchi agreed and entrusted the job to a young aspiring industrial designer who was working for him, named Shigeru Miyamoto.

"When I started my career at Nintendo, there was no such thing as videogame making at the company," recalls Miyamoto. "When I joined the company, I only wanted to be involved in making toys or entertainment products. Soon afterwards I came across videogames. But at the time, the company didn't make or sell them. My job was to draw pictures. I specialised



Donkey Kong doesn't really do a whole lot on the 'Elevator' screen, he just stands there looking confused while the spring does most of the work.



A is for Ape: Despite sharing half a moniker with a stubborn horse, the gorilla was the animal selected by Miyamoto to play the villain in his first videogame.

B is for Barrels: Rather than simply swinging down and eating Jumpman, Kong throws an infinite number of large barrels at his abusive master.

C is for Coleco: Coleco won the licensing rights to take *Donkey Kong* home.

D is for Diddy Kong: Donkey Kong's little cousin made his first appearance in *Donkey Kong Country*, and then rescued his hind in *Donkey Kong 2*.

E is for Everyman: This is the term coined for heroes like Jumpman – a generic guy that anyone who's ever tried to rescue their girlfriend from a giant ape could easily relate to.

F is for a Fistful Of Quarters: The documentary that follows two contesting *Donkey Kong* champs on a cross-country duel to see who is the real 'King of Kong.'

G is for Gunpei Yokoi: The notable Nintendo engineer was instrumental in bringing the big guy to life.

H is for 'How High Can You Try?': The grammar-dismissing message that appears in the arcade game. It was later switched to the rather dubious sounding 'How High Can You Get?'

I is for Imitations: One of the most replicated games ever, *Donkey Kong* fever created a wave of clones and giant-ape-related bandwagon jumping.

J is for Jumpman: Yes, we know it's Mario but, like all good messiahs, he was originally a carpenter with very distinctive facial hair.

K is for Kill Screen: Upon reaching Level 22, the game's timer goes loopy. Adding seconds, removing seconds, freezing seconds and then, eventually, killing you.

L is for Ladders: Without them *Donkey Kong* would be a rather short and uninteresting game.

M is for Mario Segali: Apparently the butter ball can thank a Nintendo landlord for his infamous moniker.

N is for Nintendo: Started out selling playing cards, then electronic toys, and then arcade games about big apes and carpenters.

O is for Orco the Killer Whale: Appears in *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* and is the whale pal of Donkey Kong. She helps him uncover secrets in the game by smashing into walls.

P is for Pauline: Jumpman's girlfriend and hostage of Donkey Kong. Her original name was Lady, but it was later changed because it was deemed too obvious.

Q is for Q*Bert: Warren Davis's ball of nostrils teamed up with Donkey Kong for the animated show *Saturday Supercade*.

R is for Radar Scope: From the guts of this *Galaxian*/*Space Invaders* clone came the birth of *Donkey Kong*.

S is for Shigeru Miyamoto: The prolific game designer cut his teeth on *Donkey Kong* – a project that he based around the characters in the *Popeye* cartoons.

T is for Taj: Taj is the Arabian-looking elephant that aids Diddy Kong in his quest to thwart the evil Wizpig in *Diddy Kong Racing*.

U is for Universal Studios, Inc versus Nintendo Co, Ltd: MCA Universal took Nintendo to court over *Donkey Kong*'s passing resemblance to *King Kong*. Universal lost.

V is for Very Addictive: The game's simple gameplay made it immediately accessible and extremely hard to walk away from.

W is for Wrinkly Kong. The late wife of the original Donkey Kong, sadly passed away soon after *Donkey Kong Country 3*.

X is for X-Rated Action: After Mario rescues his beloved Pauline, they engage in some soppy giant-heart action.

Y is for Yamauchi: Yamauchi was the CEO of Nintendo at the time of *Donkey Kong*'s genesis. If it wasn't for him entrusting Miyamoto with the project, the industry might have looked somewhat different today.

Z is for Zelda: Thanks to the money raised by *Donkey Kong*, Nintendo would later go on to create the iconic RPG series.



Donkey Kong Rap

THE BEGINNING OF DONKEY KONG 64 OPENS WITH THE INFAMOUS DONKEY KONG RAP. IT BASICALLY INTRODUCES THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE GAME, SHOWS OFF THEIR SPECIAL ABILITIES AND MAKES FOR SOME SIDE-SPLITTING HILARITY. HERE'S A COMPLETE WALKTHROUGH OF THE WHOLE SONG, WITH LYRICS… SHOULD YOU FEEL THE URGE TO SING ALONG…

"Here, here, here we go,
So they're finally here performing for you,
If you know the words you can join in too,
Put your hands together if you want to clap,
As we take you through this monkey rap,

Huh!!
DK, Donkey Kong!!

He's the leader of the bunch, you know him well,
He's finally back, to kick some tail,
His coconut gun can fire in spurts,
If he shoots ya, it's gonna hurt,
He's bigger, faster and stronger too,
He's the first member of the DK crew!"



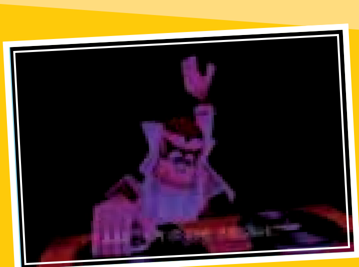


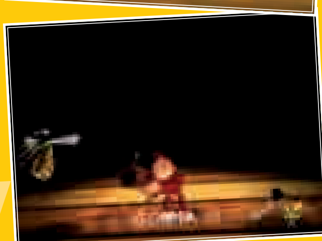


Donkey Kong/Cranky Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG

The original Donkey Kong flits between villain and hero throughout the early series, and then became an eccentric geriatric for *Donkey Kong Country*. Opening and closing the rap is Cranky. He might look like he's about to keel over and die at any second, but if his scratching skills are anything to go by, this ape still got plenty of Palma Violets left in him.

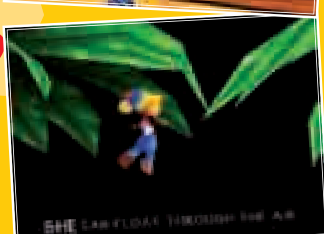


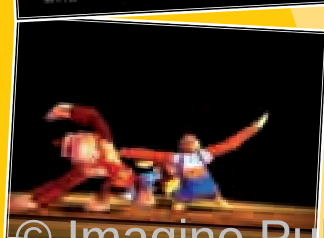


"**Huh!!**
DK, Donkey Kong!!
DK, Donkey Kong is here!!

This Kong's got style, so listen up dudes,
She can shrink in size to suit her mood,
She's quick and nimble when she needs to be,
She can float through the air and climb up trees,
If you choose her, you'll not choose wrong,
With a skip and a hop, she's one cool Kong!"







Chunky Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG 64

Chunky's the older brother of Kiddy and cousin of Dixie and Tiny. As his name implies, he's no string bean. But despite his menacing frame, he's a bit of a wimp at heart; he hates heights, but who doesn't? After staring confusingly into the camera for a few seconds, he shrinks and expands his body in size.

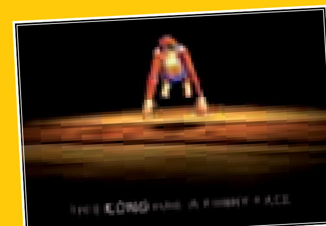


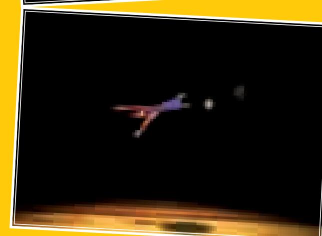


Diddy Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

Donkey Kong's nephew becomes his keen, dependable sidekick in *Donkey Kong Country*. He wears a red Nintendo cap and is rumoured to be showing his face in the upcoming *Super Smash Bros Brawl* on the Wii. After shooting up in the air with the aid of a precarious-looking wooden jetpack, he pulls out a colourful axe and proceeds to rock out.

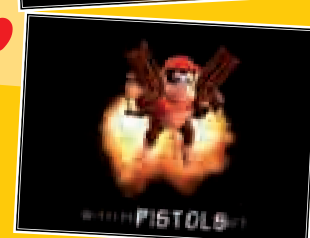


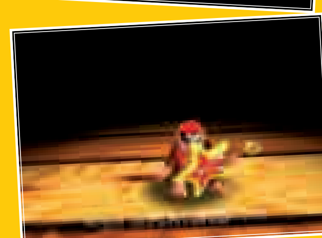


"**Huh!!**
DK, Donkey Kong!!

He has no style, he has no grace,
This Kong has a funny face,
He can handstand when he needs to,
And stretch his arms out just for you,
Inflate himself just like a balloon,
This crazy Kong just digs this tune!"



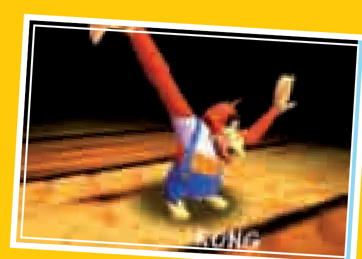


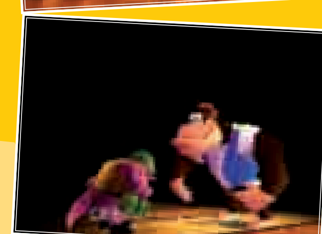


Lanky Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG 64

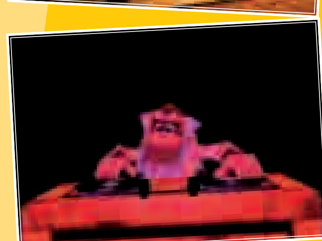
Everyone has an odd-looking relative that's loosely related to them in some way but no one can ever remember how, and *Donkey Kong* is no different. Lanky Kong was heroically freed by Donkey Kong in *Donkey Kong 64*. In the rap, Lanky contorts his face into weird shapes and sizes before letting out a monumental display of flatulence. He consequently darts around the screen like a loon.

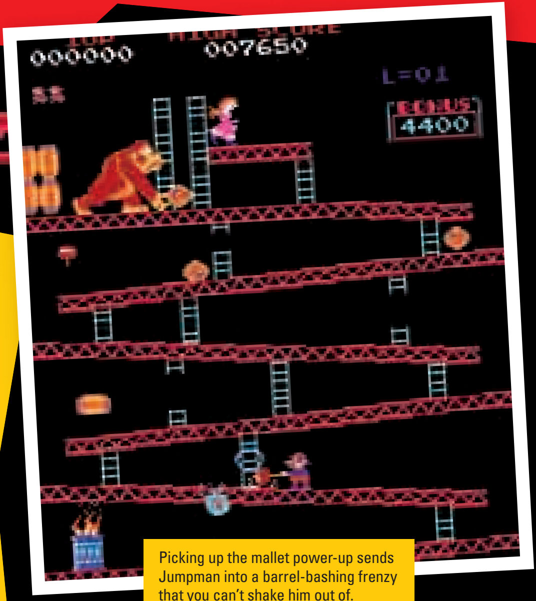




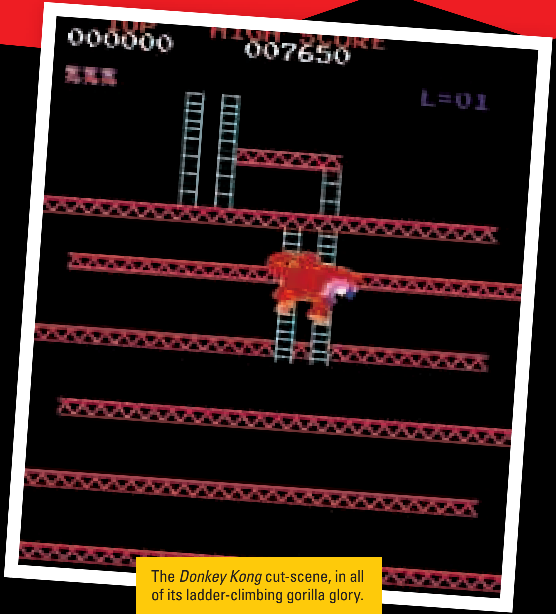
"**Huh!!**
DK, Donkey Kong!!
DK, Donkey Kong is here!!

He's back again and about time too,
And this time he's in the mood,
He can fly real high with his jetpack on,
With his pistols out
he's one tough Kong,
He'll make you smile
when he plays his tune,
But Kremlings beware
'cause he's after you!"





Picking up the mallet power-up sends Jumpman into a barrel-bashing frenzy that you can't shake him out of.



The *Donkey Kong* cut-scene, in all of its ladder-climbing gorilla glory.

in industrial design, so I was primarily drawing things to do with videogames or creating boxes for them."

Rather than update *Radar Scope*, Miyamoto set to work on designing a completely new game based around the machine's hardware. This would prove a pivotal move that would ultimately trigger Nintendo's prominence in the US arcade market.

At the time, most arcade games would require you to shoot at, or avoid, chirping sprites that disappeared faster than they had materialised. Taking inspiration from popular culture, Miyamoto decided that he would cling to the endearing love-triangle formula, used in the *Popeye* cartoons, to produce an arcade game that would emit character and playability. He set about designing characters to play three roles that he felt gamers would easily relate to: the hero (Jumpman), the damsel (Lady), and the bully (Donkey Kong).

Miyamoto's vision for Jumpman was an everyman-type character, a Joe Shmoe, someone the average gamer could relate to. Lady was a typical femme fatale, in the mould of a smouldering screen siren and Donkey Kong was the burly, misunderstood villain of the piece.

While many view Donkey Kong to be the monster of the tale, in a subtle nod to the classic *King Kong* story, Miyamoto's premise for the game isn't as black and white as it might first seem. The tale of how Jumpman finds himself coming to the rescue of Lady is one that will shatter the friendly façade of the world's most prolific plumber. Fed up of his maltreatment at the hands of his carpenter master, Donkey Kong breaks free from his cage and, as retribution, he kidnaps Jumpman's girlfriend.

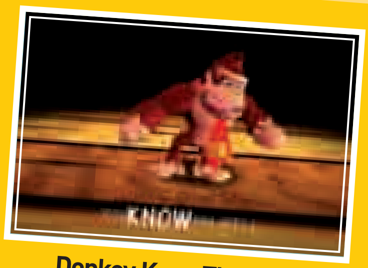
With this 'damsel in distress' scenario in his head, Miyamoto approached legendary Nintendo technician Gunpei Yokoi with his idea. And with Miyamoto pencilling the concepts and Yokoi supervising the technical aspects of the project, together they brought the superlative scenario to fruition.

Miyamoto's fertile nature easily surpassed the technical confines of the time. His idea to make the characters react in different ways and to incorporate seesaws into the action were concepts that, sadly, had to remain inside his sketchbook. While these limitations kept tabs on his creativity, ironically, they became a huge factor in shaping the iconic look of Jumpman, who would later go on to become the world's most legendary videogame icon: Mario. In an interview with Talk Asia, Shigeru Miyamoto revealed how he settled on the iconic look of Mario.

"We had to draw Mario as a small character, and at the same time we had to make him look human," he explains. "To achieve that, we needed to draw distinctive features for him, such as giving him a big nose. We gave him a moustache so that we didn't need to draw a mouth, as it is often difficult to show facial expressions with small characters. We also gave him big hands. First, we created Mario with dots, and put together these distinctive features. Then I finished with another drawing, just to show the final image of the character. I didn't have any special theory

"**Huh!!**
DK, Donkey Kong!!
Huh!!

Finally he's here, he's here for you,
It's the last member of the DK crew,
This Kong's so strong,
it isn't funny,
He'll make a Kremling
cry out for mummy,
He can pick up a boulder
with relative ease,
Makes crushing rocks seem
such a breeze,
He may move slow,
he can't jump high,
But this Kong is one heck of a guy!"



Donkey Kong The 2nd

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

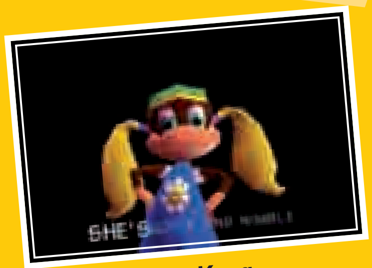
The 16-bit generation marked the arrival of a new Donkey Kong, sporting a dapper tie and posh new haircut. He's the grandson of Cranky Kong, and uncle to Diddy. He kicks off his part of the rap by doing some stretches, flexing his muscles and shooting some bees.

"**Huh!!**

C'mon Cranky take it to the fridge!

Walnuts, peanuts, pineapple smells,
Grapes, melons, oranges
and coconut shells,
Walnuts, peanuts, pineapple smells,
Grapes, melons, oranges
and coconut shells,

Oh yeah!!"



Tiny Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG 64

Dixie's sister made her first appearance in *Donkey Kong 64*. She's the tail-less sister to Dixie, and cousin to Chunky and Kiddy Kong. She's wears a beanie hat, sweat pants, and Pat Butcher-style earrings. For Tiny's chorus she punches a giant croc in the face and then runs around some palm trees.

HOLLYWOOD KONGA

KONG SMASHES INTO CINEMAS… AGAIN

Mario may have starred in his own Hollywood movie, and treated us to an hour-and-a-half long *Mario 3* advert in the form of the Fred Savage flick *The Wizard*, but *Donkey Kong* has recently been cast to take centre stage in Seth Gordon's movie: *The King Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters*. After losing his job, Steve Wiebe sets about topping the *Donkey Kong* high-score record set by Floridian Billy Mitchell. After refining his barrel leaping and rivet removing, Steve eventually betters Billy's score and becomes a local hero in his hometown. The film chronicles the pair's enmity, which comes to a nail-biting conclusion in a final cross-country duel.



'Let's get ready to Rumble Pak!'

The history of... DONKEY KONG



Donkey Kong Country allowed you to ride a rhino called Rambi. Is it any wonder it sold by the bucket loads?

behind the making of Mario. He evolved over the development process."

There are several theories as to how Miyamoto came to eventually settle on the name *Donkey Kong*. It's often cited that the original title was actually supposed to be '*Monkey Kong*,' but thanks to an over-zealous ink toner, causing a blurry fax to be sent by Nintendo, the 'M' was accidentally switched to a 'D'. But the real truth is that *Donkey Kong*'s name came down to one man: Shigeru Miyamoto, who confesses that he wanted to make his gorilla sound as stubborn and as stupid as possible. And so when thinking about animals that he deemed were mulish and dim-witted, the donkey popped into his head.

"For *Donkey Kong*, I wanted something to do with 'Kong' - a word which gives the idea of apes in Japanese. I came up with *Donkey Kong* because I heard that 'donkey' meant 'stupid'. Unfortunately, when I approached Nintendo of America with the name, nobody liked it. They said that it didn't mean 'Stupid Ape', but we went ahead with that name anyway."

It's widely regarded that *Donkey Kong* was the first game to ever introduce a cut-scene. In a pastiche to the Empire State Building ascent in *King Kong*, Donkey Kong climbs his way up to the top of a construction site, with Lady trapped brutishly under his arm. After perching her aloft the highest platform, he bends the iron girders beneath him by stomping on them, and sets the scene for our hero to make his rescue.

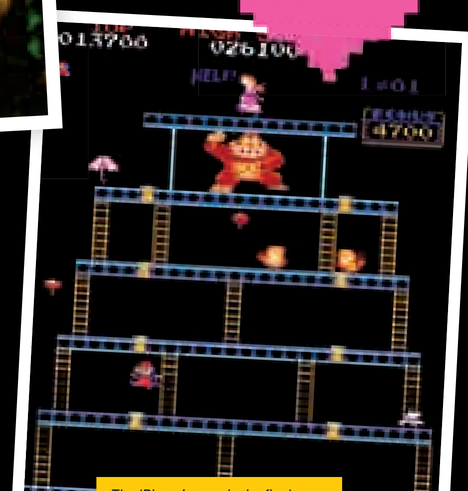
While most remember vividly the game's barrel-leaping level, it was praised for bringing multiple stages into its gameplay. *Donkey Kong* is split into four different sections, with each representing 25m of the total structure that Jumpman has to climb to rescue Lady. While late US versions of the game strangely work through the differing stages randomly, the original followed a logical configuration.

The first stage, commonly referred to as 'Girder', saw Jumpman climb a series of ladders, while avoiding barrels that Kong rolls along the platforms from the top of the screen. The second stage – nicknamed the 'Pie Factory' for its pie-like cement discs – saw Jumpman negotiate a series of conveyor belts, while avoiding deadly fireballs. The game's third stage, 'Elevator', was littered with moving lifts that had to be quickly negotiated before Jumpman became tangled up in their gears. The game's final screen 'Rivets' saw Jumpman knock out eight rivets that support an elevated Donkey Kong. Removing all of the supports caused the structure to collapse and Donkey Kong to fall on his head.

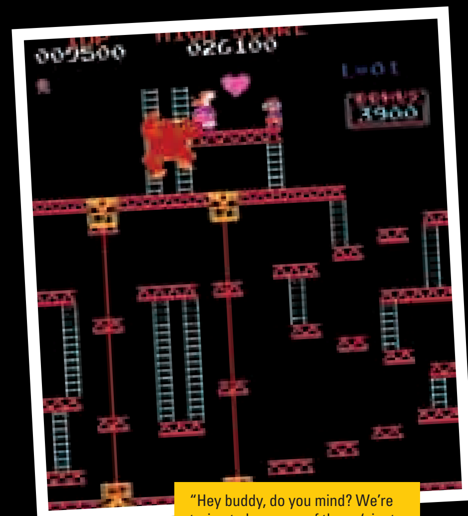
When Kong is toppled the game repeats, looping between the differing four stages and increasing in difficulty until you reach the 22nd stage. It's here you meet its infamous 'kill screen'. A timer-glitch within the game meant it was impossible to progress further than the 22nd screen. When you reach this stage it loads up with 100 seconds on the game's clock, but when Jumpman eventually appears it wildly increases to 4,000 and begins counting down to 3,700, where it freezes and then kills him on the spot.

After seeing the finished game, Arakawa quickly called his son-in-law to tell him that Miyamoto had delivered him a title that he felt could eclipse the popularity of the *Radar Scope*. Nintendo's US distributors initially greeted *Donkey Kong*'s arrival to America with pessimism. They had their reservations regarding its unique gameplay and peculiar moniker, but Arakawa sternly disagreed and went forward with translating the game's story and renaming the characters for its Western cabinet artwork. Arakawa eventually settled on Pauline for Lady – named after the wife of a Nintendo warehouseman, and Mario for Jumpman, after Mario Segali, the landlord of Nintendo of America's headquarters.

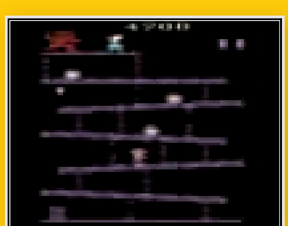
To test the water, two *Donkey Kong* machines were set up inside a Seattle bar, and its irresistible gameplay soon amassed quarters and fans in equal measure. Officially released in July 1981, demand for the machine spiralled in a month. Within a year Nintendo had sold 60,000 units, earning it a confounding $180 million. In its second year it raked in a further $100 million and the game had become a national phenomenon.

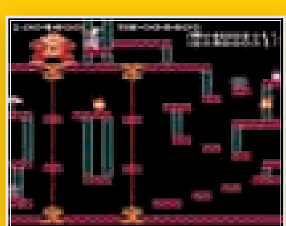


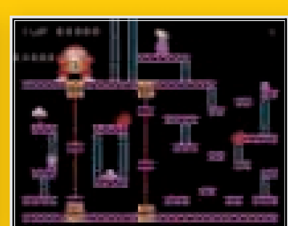
The 'Rivets' stage is the final screen and sees Donkey Kong fall to his death – well, sort of.

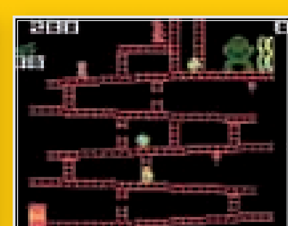


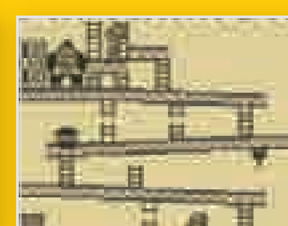
"Hey buddy, do you mind? We're trying to have one of those 'giant heart' moments."











NOTABLE KONGVERSIONS OF DONKEY KONG

ATARI 2600
Oh dear, it only has two of the four stages from the arcade game, and if you think those levels were omitted to help make the game look good, you'd be wrong. Mario looks pretty faithful, sporting moustache, flat cap and even sideburns. Donkey Kong, however, looks like Zippy from *Rainbow*. The game never ends either, it just keeps repeating its two screens until your Atari melts or you simply run out of lives.

NES
This NES classic was so popular that the cart remained in production for five years! Unfortunately, it wouldn't be an early *Donkey Kong* port without dropping stages from the arcade game, and the NES doesn't disappoint. Omitting the 'Pie Factory' level because of storage, and having slightly different sounds from the original, it might fail to offer the complete package, but it comes pretty darn close.

COLECOVISION
This fine home port came packed with the ColecoVision, so it could be considered one of the earliest examples of a killer app. It offers a pretty faithful port of the arcade, still boasting only three of the four stages, though (yep, no 'Pie Factory'). And despite an over-excessive use of the colour pink, and the fact Pauline is almost the same height as Donkey Kong, it looked and sounded remarkably faithful to the original.

INTELLIVISION
This port is marginally better than the Atari one. The first thing you notice is that Donkey Kong is green and Mario looks like Q*Bert. The game is hard to play, with Mario's jump only just clearing the enemies. Apparently, it looked so bad that when Mattel viewed it, it thought Coleco was intentionally trying to sabotage its machine. Coleco probably showed Mattel the ugly Atari port afterwards to soften the blow.

GAME BOY
More of a re-invention than a straight port, this *Donkey Kong* debut for the Game Boy was a strange Frankenstein of *Super Mario Bros* and the original *Donkey Kong* arcade game. The first four levels followed the order of the arcade game, but after Kong hits the ground with a thud, he re-awakens, grabs Pauline and escapes, leaving Mario to chase him through nine worlds of *Super Mario*-style platforming action.



By the end of 1982 Donkey Kong's hairy face could be seen on board games, cereal boxes and even in his own cartoon. With Donkey Kong becoming such a profitable icon, it was inevitable that the rights to release a home-conversion would be hotly contested. Taito, Atari and Coleco would lock horns in a bitter battle to secure the console rights to the game, and it was Coleco who would eventually emerge the victor. Yamauchi granted Coleco complete exclusivity to the home and table-top conversion of the franchise, and in return Nintendo received an undisclosed sum and a share in all cartridge sales. The contract was signed on 1 February 1982, and work on porting the arcade smash began rapidly.

Within four months, Coleco's home conversion was complete. It had stayed remarkably faithful to the original arcade game. Rather than release the game as a standalone cart, Coleco bundled the game with its ColecoVision console. It would later create versions of the game for Atari's 2600 and Mattel's Intellivision, in deals that would see its sales figures further skyrocket.

However, the air was soon to turn sour. Coleco, Nintendo and *Donkey Kong* were threatened by court action by Universal Studios, who proclaimed that the character of Donkey Kong was a blatant forgery of its stop-motion classic *King Kong*. Coleco settled with Universal out of court, but Nintendo was adamant that no infringement existed and went on to fight the case.

A catty battle ensued, but the case eventually fell through. It was discovered that Universal had successfully won a previous court battle to establish that *King Kong* was within the public domain, and so, could be used for the company's movie. The judge ruled in favour of Nintendo, and after an appeal, which was later quashed, Universal was forced to pay $1.8 million in damages to the videogame giant. It was the perfect result for Nintendo, but unfortunately Universal had already earned millions of dollars from the sale of Coleco's *Donkey Kong* carts. Coleco would later reclaim some of that money by counter-suing Universal.

As a gesture of gratitude, Nintendo presented its lawyer, John Kirby, with his own sailboat, which had been jokingly named the Donkey Kong. The company also gave him the exclusive worldwide rights to use the Donkey Kong moniker to manufacture a range of Donkey Kong sailboats. It has also been claimed that the character of Kirby was named after John Kirby, in honour of him winning the case.

With the popularity of *Donkey Kong* swathing the air like a potent jungle fever, Miyamoto quickly got to work on an arcade sequel. Probably as a result of *Donkey Kong*'s unprecedented popularity, for his second instalment, *Donkey Kong Jr*, he muddied up the three central roles. He made Donkey Kong the 'damsel in distress', Mario the eponymous villain and the role of hero fell to the knuckles of Donkey Kong's son, Junior.

Retaining the simple platform formula, it found Junior swinging from vines, avoiding bear traps with piranha qualities and collecting fruit across four varying stages that would loop and increase in difficulty. Mimicking the original, you would complete each stage by reaching the top of the screen where Mario had Donkey Kong chained in shackles. While the game proved to be a popular sequel, it failed to imitate the same level of success that *Donkey Kong* had reaped the previous year.

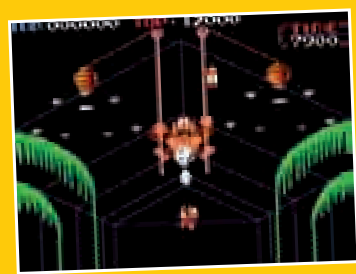
OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Kameo Appearances

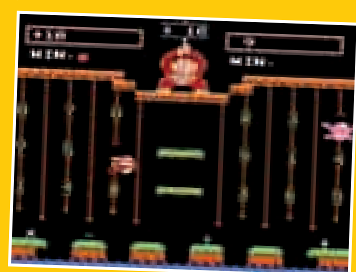
WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE FINEST CAMEOS AND PECULIAR TITLES THAT DONKEY KONG HAS PUT HIS NAME TO...



MARIO PARTY
Released: 1998
System: N64
The Nintendo squad play animated pieces in an interactive board game. *Mario Party* spawned eight sequels (and seven of those managed to somehow stretch over two consoles). The aim was to obtain as many gold stars as possible by winning in the various mini-games that were dished up. Unlike *Mario Kart*, the characters didn't really differ in attributes, so as far as cameos go, this series was an easy one for Donkey Kong – he just had to turn up and look ape-like.



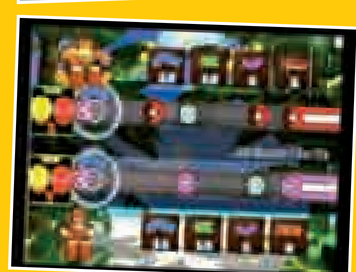
DONKEY KONG 3
Released: 1986
Systems: Arcade, NES, GBA, PC-88
This strange platform/shooter puts Donkey Kong back into the role of the villainous ape and you inside the pants of Stanley the Bugman. Using a can of Raid, you had to help Stanley protect his flowers by spraying angry bees in the face. Donkey Kong would occasionally drop projectiles at you from the top of the screen, and when you found a spare second, you had to hop onto the higher platforms and repel him with a quick, sharp spray to progress on to the next stage.



DONKEY KONG JR MATH
Released: 1983
Systems: NES, Virtual Console
Donkey Kong would hold up a number, and you would climb up vines to collect numbers and operators to make an equation that could equal that number. If you managed to get the equation correct, you were awarded an apple (shouldn't that have been a banana?). It's certainly a novel way of helping children improve their maths skills, but unfortunately, as with anything you attach the word 'math' to, it soon becomes as enjoyable as circling the full stops in a newspaper with an empty pen.



DONKEY KONG HOCKEY
Released: 1984
Systems: LCD
This one has to get a mention. It tops *Donkey Kong Jr Math* for sheer randomness. It's an early portable game released by Nintendo that saw Mario and Donkey Kong take to the ice and fight on opposing hockey teams. The peculiar portable came packed with two circular control pads that stemmed out from its sides. It allowed for some exciting, if somewhat cramped, two-player LCD hockey action. Many thanks to Steven Read from Miniarcade.com for helping us with the image.



DONKEY KONGA
Released: 2003
Systems: GameCube
Developed by the team responsible for the popular *Taiko Drum Master* games on the PS2, this rhythm-action game had you matching the beats on screen using a set of bongos. Its success would generate two sequels, the second of which, *Donkey Konga 3*, was only released in Japan. However, the game is worth tracking down for its track listing alone, which is teeming with retro-arcade sounds, including *Metro-Cross* and *Final Lap*.

Miyamoto set to work designing Donkey Kong. A pivotal move that would trigger Nintendo's prominence in the US market

The history of... DONKEY KONG

Donkey Kong's irresistible gameplay soon amassed quarters and fans in equal measure

KARTOON KAPER



After seeing the floods of quarters that the videogame industry was bringing in, US television giant, CBS, decided to get in on the action by commissioning *Saturday Supercade*: a cartoon collaboration of popular videogame characters. It pureed Frogger, Pitfall Harry and Q*Bert into generic cartoon capers that would see them solving mysteries, dishing out morals, or, in poor Donkey Kong's case, facing a life of circus imprisonment. Each episode involved a constantly smiling Donkey Kong escaping from Mario and his niece Pauline (yes, that would make her Luigi's daughter), by thinking up 20 head-slapping methods of absconding (one even included using a shark as a jet-ski).

Within two years, *Donkey Kong* had created an influx of bandwagon bootlegs. In response to the game's popularity, Sega published a strange *Donkey Kong* clone called *Congo Bongo*. Developed by audiovisual manufacturer Ikegami Tsushinki, its isometric perspective might have looked poles apart from *Donkey Kong*, but it was undeniably based on Nintendo's concept. *Congo Bongo*'s humorous plot found the protagonist perusing a giant ape not for wealth, fortune or love, but in revenge for a dangerous 'practical joke' that involved the ape setting fire to his tent while he was sleeping. While the game easily eclipsed *Donkey Kong* in the ridiculous story stakes, it unfortunately couldn't measure up to its commercial success.

While 1983 proved a prolific period for Nintendo and *Donkey Kong*, unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for the US videogame market. The Nintendo Famicom was about to launch in Japan, Miyamoto was about to release another *Donkey Kong* arcade game and the bottom of the videogame market in North America was about to well and truly drop out.

Donkey Kong 3 saw a strange departure from Miyamoto's previous *Donkey Kong* games. There was no Mario, no Pauline, and no simian-sibling. Its peculiar plot centred on Donkey Kong's love for greenhouse vandalism. After breaking into Stanley the Bugman's greenhouse, Donkey Kong clings to its rafters and narks off several bees by impolitely punching their hives. The miffed bees fly out and, upon noticing Donkey Kong's large frame, they opt to take their anger out on Stanley's prized begonias. Armed with a can of insecticide, you had to help Stanley eradicate the airborne-pests and scare Donkey Kong away before the bees flew to the bottom of the screen and massacred his flowers.

Perhaps, due to its stark change in gameplay, *Donkey Kong 3* failed to mirror the success of its two arcade cohorts, and Nintendo soon turned its attention towards the Famicom. Arcade ports of *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr* would make up two of the three launch games for the console. The Famicom would also mark the first straight-to-console outing for *Donkey Kong*, in a game that probably had many of the series' fans scratching their heads in bafflement.

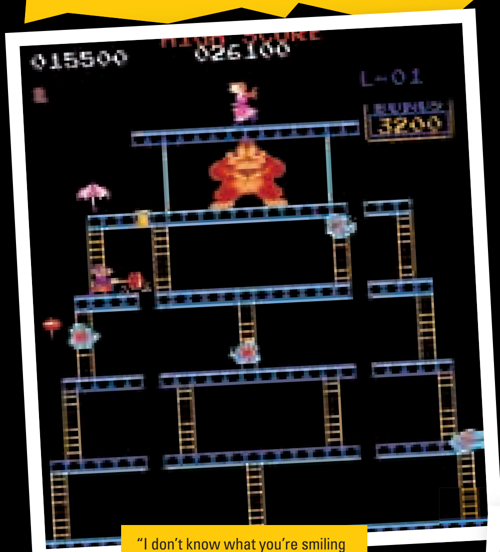
Nintendo felt the need to release an 'education series' for its console, and believed that Donkey Kong was the best character to champion its unusual arithmetic tutor, *Donkey Kong Jr Math*. The game is as crazy and as exciting as its title suggests. Reprising the role of Junior, the player must climb up vines and collect numbers and operators to equal the number that Donkey Kong holds up in the air. There were three modes of play in the game, one of which included a two-player option that allowed two friends to battle it out Countdown-style to win some digital apples. *Donkey Kong Jr Math* was released in Japan in 1983 and would later become a launch game for the Famicom when it was released in the United States two years later.

It would be a decade before *Donkey Kong* would escape again. In 1994, Miyamoto would release a strange *Super Mario*/*Donkey Kong* hybrid for the Game Boy. Using the confusing title of *Donkey Kong*, fans of the original arcade game hoping for a faithful monochrome reproduction would be disappointed. While the game retained the first four levels from the original, a Mario with a super back-flip jump that rendered the ladders useless, and the odd ability to catch barrels using his feet, meant the game was a bit of a pointless episode. It proved a popular title for the handheld, nonetheless, and also marked the first appearance of Donkey Kong's tie, which, from that point, would become obligatory for the franchise.

Over time, the Super Nintendo had eventually mirrored the popularity of the NES. Nintendo had gone through a stage of dusting off all its old IPs and giving them a 16-bit make over. *Metroid*, *Mario* and *Zelda* had proved extremely successful titles for the console, but the industry was being dazzled by the visual leap that 32-bit software had taken. The Saturn and PlayStation were wowing the industry with solid, realistic, 3D models that made 2D adventures look dated by comparison. Nintendo needed a strong title to inject interest back into the SNES, and it believed *Donkey Kong* could be the ape to do it.

Nintendo handed the reins to Rare, and Chris Stamper and his group of developers set about transforming the archaic-looking arcade game into one of the most dazzling SNES titles ever (see our Making Of on page 68). Rare had recently taken a huge financial gamble by purchasing several 3D graphic terminals from Silicon Graphics. These machines allowed them to create beautiful pre-rendered 3D characters capable of inhibiting depth and fluidity. The company named this technology ACM (Advanced Character Modelling), and would unveil this ground-breaking development process with *Donkey Kong Country*. This would mark the first time that Miyamoto would not be directly involved in a *Donkey Kong* project.

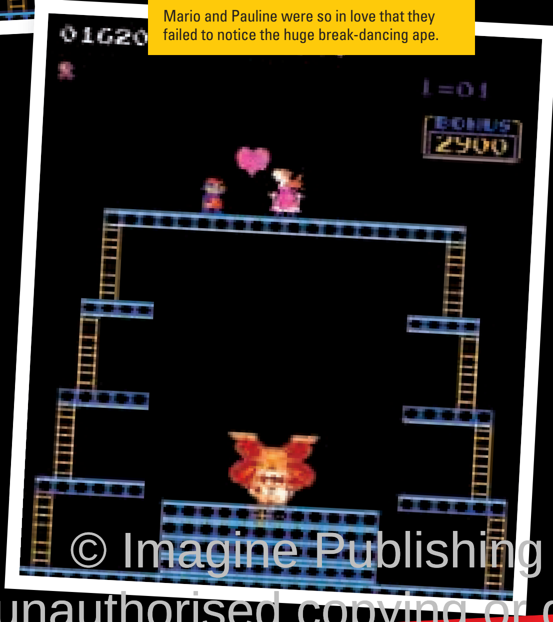
Donkey Kong Country was markedly different in



"I don't know what you're smiling about, one more rivet and you're toast, my friend."



Donkey Kong Country 2 had a swashbuckling theme to it, and allowed you to throw your buddy into giant rats.



Mario and Pauline were so in love that they failed to notice the huge break-dancing ape.

KRAZY KOPY



Of the plentiful *Donkey Kong* clones that appeared after its release, *Crazy Kong* is one of the better to have emerged. Developed by Falcon, it was based around the hardware of Nichibutsu's *Crazy Climber* arcade game. Released the same year as *Donkey Kong*, it looks remarkably similar to the Nintendo classic. In fact, it's so alike that Nintendo went on to stop Falcon from releasing the game in the United States. Subsequently, in certain parts of Europe, *Krazy Kong* would actually become more popular than *Donkey Kong*. The clearest distinction between the two games is the different order in which the stages appear. Also, Falcon's Kong actually looks capable of foaming at the mouth, ditching the barrels and eating you.



HANDHELD HONOURS

After spotting a bored Japanese businessman amusing himself by pressing the buttons on his calculator (probably trying to spell the word 'boobies'), Gunpei Yokoi had a brainwave. He would drop the boring numbers and replace them with endearing moving graphics. The result would become Nintendo's portable LCD game series, Game & Watch. *Donkey Kong* was one of the earliest games to get a Game & Watch translation. Split over two-screens, the action centred solely on the game's 'Girder' stage. This version did incorporate a somewhat dramatic way of toppling poor Kong – Mario had to cut wires that supported the platform Kong was standing on. It also introduced a crane into the mix, which Mario could use to pull himself up with.



Donkey Kong Jr. saw a slight tweak in the *Donkey Kong* gameplay.



This is how the US flag would have looked had it incorporated two monkeys hanging from a rope.

gameplay from previous *Donkey Kong* outings. Sporting a smart red tie and a twirly haircut, a new dynamic Donkey Kong (grandson to the pioneering Kong) was let loose inside a vast, side-scrolling gaming reserve. Aided by his nephew Diddy Kong, in typical 'run-and-jump' fashion, they had to collect bananas, stomp on heads to defeat the evil King K Rool and his band of Kremlings. The game introduced a number of features that helped it stand out from other platform games, and a number of new Kongs into the *Donkey Kong* series, too. The game made use of a unique tagging system, which allowed you to switch between Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong at any point during the action, and it also saw the duo jumping onto the backs of their animal friends and using their vibrant jungle surrounding to great effect.

When the game was finally unveiled at the Summer Consumer Electronics Show in 1994, many of the attendees were left dumbfounded by the fact that the game was running on a humble SNES. Selling over eight-million copies, it went on to become one of the biggest-selling 16-bit games of all time.

Donkey Kong Country would later span two further SNES sequels. The second game, *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest*, chronicled Donkey Kong's capture at the hands of King K Rool and the rescue effort by Diddy and his sister Dixie. Rare tweaked the gameplay by introducing a number of new features into the game. It adapted the decisive 'buddy' system to allow you to hit enemies and reach inaccessible areas using the other character. It also introduced Easter eggs and secrets that would require meticulous scavenging and increase the game's longevity.

The third and final game in the *Donkey Kong Country* series, *Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble*, was released in 1996. This time it was Diddy and Donkey Kong who would be held captive by the Kremlings (these Kongs should really start reading up on Stockholm Syndrome). With Dixie and little brother Kiddy Kong supplanted in the lead roles, the third adventure introduced side quests and a greater need for exploration. But, considering the huge inaugural leaps in gameplay that the first two games had taken, it felt like a lacklustre farewell to the Super Nintendo – a sentiment reflected in its reviews and sales.

Nintendo was late to enter the 32-bit arena, and as a result its new console became a bit of a 64-bit stopgap. Rare had proved instrumental in helping the N64 achieve early commercial success with its titles Blast Corps, GoldenEye and Banjo-Kazooie, and having demonstrated its technical flair by squeezing whatever juice was left from inside the ageing Super Nintendo, the company was once again handed the responsibility of *Donkey Kong* by Nintendo.

Ironically, a new console marked yet another new direction for the series. *Diddy Kong Racing* was Rare's turn at the *Mario Kart*-racer. Its unique mix of racing and adventure ran rings around the *Mario Kart 64*'s short life span, and it soon edged in front of the prolific karting classic.

In 1999, Rare's Gregg Mayles would spearhead *Donkey Kong*'s eventual platform transition to the N64. Utilising the *Banjo-Kazooie* engine, *Donkey Kong 64* was a sprawling adventure that was so huge that it came bundled with an extra 4MB of RAM. Coincidentally, it would be the first title to make use of the N64 expansion pack, and special editions of the game would be packed in banana-yellow cartridges. The game's plot centred on more Kong abductions and even more banana collecting, it introduced further apes into the franchise and its electric intro would be the first time we ever got to hear the peculiar Donkey Kong Rap. The game was greeted with mixed reviews by the press. Some argued that the game felt too similar to *Banjo-Kazooie*, others thought that it failed to pack the same punch as *Donkey Kong*'s Super Nintendo debut. Regardless, the title proved popular and would eventually go on to win the E3 Game Critic award for Best Platform Game in 1999, and become widely considered as a popular appendage to the *Donkey Kong Country* series.

In 2002, as a result of a record-breaking $377 million acquisition by Microsoft, Rare would no longer be an exclusive developer for Nintendo. It would work on exclusive titles for the Xbox console and continue to develop games for Nintendo's handhelds. This deal would spell the end of the planned GameCube racer, *Donkey Kong Racing* – the highly anticipated follow-up to *Diddy Kong Racing*. A video of the running game was exhibited at E3 in 2001, featuring Donkey Kong and friends racing on the back of their animal friends. This cancelled project led many to feel that the future of *Donkey Kong* could be in jeopardy.

However, he was to make a noisy re-emergence in 2004, with the most peculiar genre-dip in the franchise to date. Developed by Namco, *Donkey Konga* was a quirky game that retained the *Donkey Kong Country* 'look' that Rare had infused into the series. It allowed gamers to test their mettle on a set of plastic bongos, and keep the beat to a playlist of classic gaming gems. Favourable reviews and brisk sales would see the series spawn two sequels, with the latter only getting a Japanese release.

Donkey Kong would finally return home in 2005 for *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* on the GameCube. Developed by Nintendo's EAD (Entertainment Analysis and Development) department, the final Donkey Kong caper on the GameCube was a unique platform adventure that borrowed rhythmic elements from *Donkey Konga*. Hitting the left and right bongos moved Donkey Kong in the corresponding direction, through his beautiful, animated world. It also introduced a unique combo system that would appeal to high-score chasers, and give the game immense longevity.

The latest chapter in *Donkey Kong*'s lengthy bio is soon to be released on Nintendo's Wii. *Donkey Kong Barrel Blast* charts another genre switch for the franchise that Nintendo never seemed anxious to experiment with. Originally scheduled to be released on the GameCube, the *Mario Kart*-style racer was planned to make use of the GameCube's bongo peripheral, but its development was later ported to the Wii, and the controls were altered to make full use of the Wii remote.

It has certainly been a sporadic life for *Donkey Kong*, and trying to confine the series to one particular genre has proved nigh on impossible. From softening the *Radar Scope* backlash, to bankrolling the Famicom, *Donkey Kong* has always played a prominent role in Nintendo's history. It was the title that launched the company's empire, and first introduced the world to Mario. It's a pivotal game for Nintendo, and a special one for Miyamoto.

"I like all the games that I've worked on", Miyamoto says, "so it's really hard to pick any one game, but I guess, because of its impact, and because I started it at a time when there wasn't even anything called 'game design', I guess it would have to be *Donkey Kong*. It was from there that I chose the path that I took and went from a simple industrial designer to a 'game design specialist'."



DONKEY KONG family tree

After debuting as a girlfriend-stealing ape, Donkey Kong has gone on to star in numerous games. Clearly not shy of the spotlight, Donkey Kong has made cameo appearances in dozens of Nintendo titles, many of which we didn't have room for here. Most of the time you need to look really hard, but perseverance does pay off. *Punch-Out!*, *Super Punch-Out!!*, *Tetris*, *F1-Race*, *NES Open Tournament Golf*, *Mario's Time Machine*, *Super Mario RPG* and *Mario Tennis* on the Game Boy Color are just a few of Donkey Kong's starring moments.

Now, as well known as his original nemesis, Mario, the celebrity simian's family tree is long overdue…



DONKEY KONG



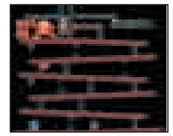
- 1981
- Arcade
- When Nintendo's *Radar Scope* was a flop, Miyamoto was asked to create a new game. The result was this classic, which established Nintendo as a firm to watch. With simple but addictive gameplay, this title saw Donkey Kong's debut.

DONKEY KONG JR



- 1982
- Arcade
- *Donkey Kong Jr* saw the tables turn as the eponymous hero rescued his dad from the clutches of Mario. With four distinctive levels – The Vines, The Chains, The Jumpboard and The Hideout – this was just as enjoyable as *Donkey Kong*.

DONKEY KONG CLASSICS



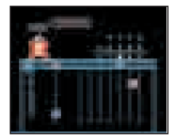
- 1982
- Famicom
- Cashing in on *DK's* success, Nintendo released *Donkey Kong Classics*, a rehash of *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr*. Although it was just an amalgamation, fans loved it. An arcade version – *Double Donkey Kong* – was also released.

DONKEY KONG 3



- 1983
- Arcade
- Nintendo released the third *Donkey Kong* game in as many years in 1983. Stanley replaced Mario and you had to shoot DK with insect repellent while guarding five plants at the bottom of the screen. Fun, but not in the same league as the previous games.

DONKEY KONG JR MATH



- 1983
- Famicom
- *Donkey Kong Jr Math* was a real disappointment. Although there were three gameplay modes in this number-based edutainment title, they were all very simplistic and dull. Fortunately, Donkey Kong Jr never went to school again.

HANDHELD

GAME & WATCH SERIES



- 1982 – 1984
- Game & Watch
- There are many strange and quirky LCD titles that Donkey Kong has appeared in. We've already touched on the original *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Hockey*, but how about *Donkey Kong 3*, which is nothing like the arcade game. There's no Stanley, no wasps, just Mario and Donkey Kong spraying insecticide in each others eyes. Or how about the odd *Donkey Kong Circus*, which you could argue is a prequel to the original game. It finds the big guy balancing on a barrel while juggling pineapples and avoiding flames. No wonder he escaped. Then there's titles like Donkey Kong II, which has you playing as DK's son who has to swing up vines and jump across the heads of crocodiles and Donkey Kong Jr (no guesses for who you end up playing there). Some of them now go for a pretty penny.

DONKEY KONG



- 1994
- Game Boy
- It was inevitable that DK would appear on the Game Boy after his SNES success. The first four levels were identical to the original arcade game, but there were plenty of new ones too. Mario had new abilities, but they spoilt the gameplay a bit.

DONKEY KONG LAND



- 1995
- Game Boy
- There was no denying that Rare had created an extremely close conversion of its SNES hit, although it was obviously scaled down. While the visuals took a hit, all the gameplay from the SNES version had been captured perfectly.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 1994
- SNES
- Created by Rare and featuring some of the most gorgeous visuals SNES owners had ever seen, this scrolling platformer felt incredibly fresh and proved there was life in the old ape yet. DK was the hero as he set out to find his stash of bananas.

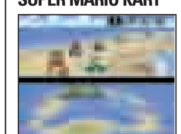
RARE CONNECTION

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY'S KONG QUEST



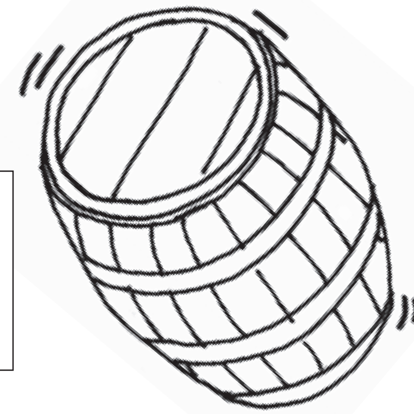
- 1995
- SNES
- *Diddy 'sKong Quest* was the superb follow-up to Rare's smash hit and added new twists to the gameplay. With Donkey Kong captured, it was up to Diddy and Dixie Kong to save him, and you were able to turn into various animals.

SUPER MARIO KART



- 1992
- SNES
- While many assume that Donkey Kong made his SNES debut in *Mario Kart*, it was actually Junior playing the yin to Bowser's yang. This assumption is the second worst rookie mistake in videogame history (the first is purchasing an N-Gage).

GUEST STAR



DONKEY KONG LAND 2



- 1996
- Game Boy
- Sadly, Rare's second Game Boy title failed to match the previous game. The biggest problem was that a key move from the SNES version – the great throwing system – had been dropped. The game was visually impressive, though.

DONKEY KONGA SERIES

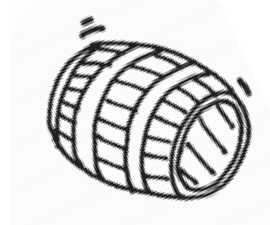


- 2003 – present
- GameCube
- This popular rhythmic action game uses a set of bongos to bang out its tunes. The series has so far spawned three games, with the latter only receiving a Japan release. It's a shame because it boasts a great list of classic videogame tunes.

MARIO KART 64



- 1996
- N64
- Although it would be three more years before he featured in his own game again, Donkey Kong was happy to show his gaming versatility. After proving a popular character in *Super Mario Kart*, DK was behind the wheel again for the N64 sequel.



GAME & WATCH GALLERY SERIES



- 1997 – 2002
- GBC, GBA
- Starting with the second *Gallery* game, Donkey Kong immediately became a key character in the series. All the games here were perfect replicas of the original titles and included special re-creations as well. A great way to see some classics.

DONKEY KONG LAND III



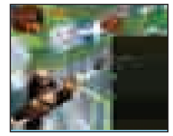
- 1997
- Game Boy
- Despite having fewer RPG elements, Rare's third Game Boy title was a faithful adaptation of its last SNES release. The visuals looked highly impressive and Rare eventually ported the game to Nintendo's Game Boy Color.

DK COUNTRY 3: DIXIE KONG'S DOUBLE TROUBLE



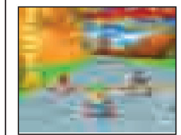
- 1996
- SNES
- The last *Donkey Kong Country* game saw Dixie and Kiddie Kong saving Diddy and Donkey Kong. This title featured lots of mini-games and a few RPG elements. With visuals to die for, *DKC 3* was one of the last big titles for Nintendo's dying machine.

DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT



- 2004
- GameCube
- This stupidly addictive platformer milks further use from Donkey Kong's bongos (ooh, er). Controlling Kong by hitting the bongo-pads, it was a wacky score-chasing affair that had you racking-up points through action-packed combos.

DIDDY KONG RACING



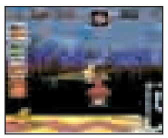
- 1997
- N64
- Although Kong himself was nowhere to be seen, Diddy Kong proved that he was just as good when it came to racing karts. With a superb Adventure mode that took ages to complete, *Diddy Kong Racing* was another hit from Rare.

MARIO GOLF



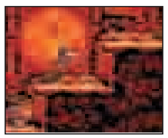
- 1999
- N64
- Keen to prove there was more to him than just hanging around platforms and driving karts, DK showed he could play a decent game of golf. His size meant he was perfect for taking long, powerful shots, though often at the expense of accuracy.

MARIO KART SUPER CIRCUIT



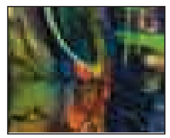
- 2001
- GBA
- The lure of karting was too much for our favourite ape and he hit the tarmac once again in 2001. Created by the excellent Intelligent Systems and featuring all the SNES tracks as a hidden bonus, *Super Circuit* made for a great handheld experience.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 2000
- Game Boy Color
- Another rejig of the SNES hit, but this time the results were much closer to the original. Rare found time to add extra levels and a few enjoyable mini-games. Definitely worth playing, if only to see the improvements over *Donkey Kong Land*.

DONKEY KONG 64



- 1999
- N64
- Rare went to town with its next *Kong* platformer, which was so big it had to use the N64's Expansion Pak. With a funky theme tune and five controllable Kongs, *DK64* also contained a version of the original *Donkey Kong*.

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE FEVER



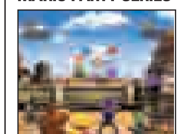
- 2005
- Arcade
- At one point we thought it was an arcade re-dux of *Jungle Beat* and then were certain it was a peculiar looking pachinko machine. It's actually a penny-falls game which, despite its moniker, has nothing to do with Spike Lee.

SUPER SMASH BROS SERIES



- 1999 – present
- N64, GameCube, Wii
- Pitting some of Nintendo's well-loved characters against each other, *Super Smash Bros* is an immensely enjoyable brawler that finally allowed Donkey Kong to wrap his big hairy banana openers around Mario's throat.

MARIO PARTY SERIES



- 1999 – present
- N64, Wii
- The *Mario Party* franchise has had varying degrees of success. Nintendo updates each iteration with new mini-games and characters but, for us, the third and fifth games are the best as they pushed the series in new directions.

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG



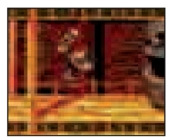
- 2004
- GBA
- Donkey Kong is the bad guy again and Mario must travel through six huge worlds to retrieve the mini-Marios that the giant ape has stolen. With a combination of puzzle and platform action, *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* already sounds very promising.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 2003
- GBA
- Hoping to make a quick buck, Nintendo re-released its SNES classic and added a few extra mini-games. Sadly, the visuals were nowhere near as impressive as before and even the gameplay seemed to have suffered in the translation.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3



- 2005
- GBA
- Probably the most faithful of the three GBA ports when comparing them to their SNES counterparts, but that's only because hardly anything new was added or tweaked this time out. It's still a great game nonetheless.

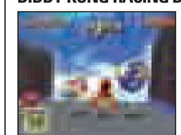
OFFBEAT

MARIO TENNIS SERIES



- 2000
- N64
- The lure of a good sports game was always tough for Donkey Kong Jr to resist so he joined Mario and Luigi on the tennis courts. The big ape could pull off some very impressive shots and was a tough adversary. A Cube version is due next year.

DIDDY KONG RACING DS



- 2007
- DS
- This remake of Diddy's popular kart classic introduced a track editor and online racing. It's a faithful conversion that fans of the original will no doubt dig, but sadly its weak stylus features feel a tad shoehorned and somewhat flawed.

DK: KING OF SWING



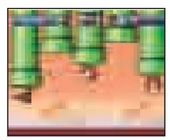
- 2005
- GBA
- Kong and Diddy reunite in a puzzler polarised around the GBA shoulder buttons. Swinging from pegs, the action sees them thwarting that devious King K Rool to reclaim stolen medals (well at least he dropped that pointless banana thievery).

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2



- 2004
- GBA
- This was one of the better *Donkey Kong Country* ports to appear on the GBA. It boasted a few new moves and a whole bunch of cool mini-games, offering a well-needed break from all that monkey business.

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG 2: MARCH OF THE MINIS



- 2006
- DS
- This comical puzzler brought back that messy love triangle between Mario, DK and Pauline. It's basically a *Lemmings*/*Krusty's Super Fun House*-type puzzler, without the lemmings and without Krusty.

DONKEY KONG: BANANA KINGDOM



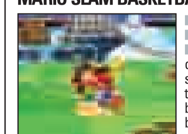
- 2007
- Arcade
- Another penny-falls game from Capcom, but this time it's a six-person game; that doesn't mean it takes six people to play it, rather six people can feed a yen to Kong at precisely the same time.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!



- 2003
- GameCube
- Now that each Kart could carry two players, it was finally possible to create the ultimate monkey duo. The combination of Diddy Kong's speed and Donkey Kong's handling meant the furry pair were extremely tough to beat.

MARIO SLAM BASKETBALL



- 2007
- DS
- Nintendo's ape certainly loves his sports. This time the tie-wearing brute takes to the basketball courts and shows off his ball skills. Interestingly, this is by Square Enix, best known for their many RPGs.

MARIO KART DS

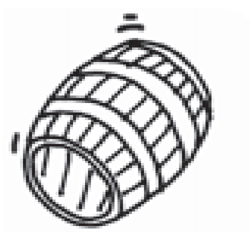


- 2005
- DS
- The ability to race your friends via Wi-Fi, decorate your vehicle with a rude decal and partake in a new Mission mode really makes this is a great *Mario Kart* conversion and an essential DS title.

DK JUNGLE CLIMBER



- 2007
- DS
- The follow up to *DK: King Of Swing* is reputed to maintain the peg-clutching gameplay while making clever use of the DS stylus. It also reverts back to the shiny look of Rare's *Kong*.



DONKEY KONG BARREL BLAST



- 2007
- Wii
- Reputed to be created from the guts of Rare's *Donkey Kong Racing*, *Barrel Blast* finds DK and his crew straddling jet-powered barrels in a strange hybrid of *Diddy Kong Racing* meets *WipEout*.

MARIO STRIKERS



- 2007
- Wii
- We're avoiding the Wayne Rooney/Donkey Kong jokes that are lining up to be blasted out of the park (that would just be mean and immature). It's no *Pro Evo*, but where *Mario Strikers* really excels is in multiplayer – just ask Ian Wright.

YOSHI'S ISLAND DS



- 2006
- DS
- Baby Donkey Kong is just one of the many cute Nintendo stars that Yoshi gets to ferry around in this charming little platformer. Yoshi can use his furry friend to climb vines to reach out of the way platforms.

SNK'S EXCELLENT 'CUTE-'EM-UP' IS REALLY WORTH TRYING TO GET YOUR HANDS ON

TWINKLE STAR SPRITES

It may plaster your screen with more pastel shades than the entire Dulux catalogue and feature a cast of ridiculous Sailor Moon rejects, but Twinkle Star Sprites is one intense and compulsive 2D shooter. Mike Bevan reveals the subtle intricacies of a game that lets you rain down hundreds of deadly cartoon fireballs on your rival's head while grinning like a raving lunatic

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SNK

» **DEVELOPER:** ADK

» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NEO-GEO

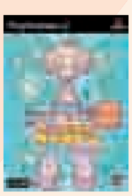
» **ALSO AVAILABLE FOR:** SEGA SATURN, SEGA DREAMCAST, SONY PS2 (UPDATED VERSION)

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** NEO-GEO (CD) – £69
NEO GEO MVS/AES – £500+
OTHER VERSIONS – £40+

» **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:** PUCHI CARAT (PLAYSTATION, ALSO ON PS2 – TAITO LEGENDS 2 COLLECTION)

We have to admit that here at **Retro Gamer** we're a bit stumped recommending a title that compares to *Twinkle Star Sprites*. It really is a one-off. However, for a taster of a similarly competitive two-player experience you could do a lot worse than look to any number of versus puzzle-game titles, such as the *Bust-A-Move* (*Puzzle Bobble*) series, or Capcom's *Super Puzzle Fighter* games. Another good bet might be Taito's *Puchi Carat*, a 'cute' split-screen competitive *Breakout* clone, which might well be the closest title, gameplay wise, to actually get a release in the UK.



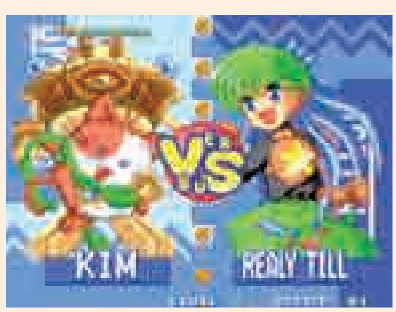


Fact Of The Month
Twinkle Star Sprites: La Petite Princess A sequel to the original Neo-Geo game, *Twinkle Star Sprites: La Petite Princess* was released in 2005 on the PlayStation 2. Sporting updated polygon-modelled graphics, there's little else in terms of new features, but it plays much like the original, and two-player bouts are as enjoyable as they ever were.

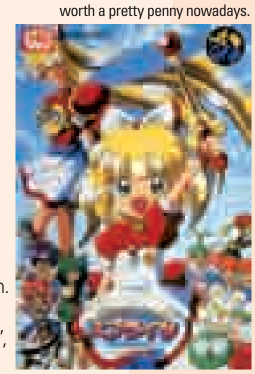


» The Neo-Geo home AES version is worth a pretty penny nowadays.

メガ駆動機構 **There are two distinct schools of the shoot-'em-up design ethic. So-called 'serious' shooters like *R-Type* and *Gradius*, for example, feature dark, moody environs, often inspired by the visual style of Western sci-fi artists, like HR Giger, and emphasise technology over character-driven storylines.** The 'ships' you pilot in such games are extremely capable pieces of hardware, such as the *Gradius* series' Vic Viper or the *Darius* series' Silver Hawk. Their beautiful sleek lines belie their judicious ability to spew forth laser death. You really wouldn't want to mess with any of them.



» "Tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be… a magical flying cat."



Then there's the 'cute-'em-up', typified by titles like *TwinBee* and *Parodius*. These often feature surreal and colourful, quasi-garish backgrounds and bizarre (to Western eyes) character-heavy plot lines. They also tend to populate their worlds with a host of wacky denizens often designed in the cartoon-like 'anime'-style more in tune with Japanese sensibilities. Here you're much more likely to be 'piloting' a flying penguin (?!), bunny rabbit or cute girl on a broomstick than an R-9 space fighter. And, for your average non-Japanese gamer, this

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

N PROMISE



» The World Map is certainly very pretty.



» Kim's smart bomb in action (right-hand screen).

could be considered a bit weird, or so the marketing people seem to think. As such, many of these titles never make it out of their country of origin, or at least past the Asian Pacific Rim. And a crying shame it is, too.

SNK's *Twinkle Star Sprites* falls firmly into the latter of the two camps, but don't let that fool you. At its heart is an incredibly deep, intense and uniquely gratifying gaming experience, which anyone who's ever gained the slightest enjoyment from de-pixellating a space invader should really try at least once, if only for one small reason. It's quite possibly one of the finest and most compelling competitive two-player games ever created. Its core concept could be described as that of a 'versus shoot-'em-up'. If that term brings to mind something like Sega's *Virtual On*, think again. *Twinkle Star Sprites* is a hybrid of traditional shoot-'em-ups, competitive puzzle games and arcade fighting titles, but stands



» The Saturn port can be picked up for considerably cheaper than the Neo-Geo original.



» A sticky situation for player one.

on its own terms as something so original it almost requires its own sub-genre.

The game's action revolves around a split-screen format with you and your competitor playing in separate scrolling windows. It's basically two little vertical shoot-'em-ups side by side, and at first you'll be more concerned with shooting or dodging the enemies in your immediate vicinity rather than what the player on the opposite side of the screen is up to, but here's the clever bit. Every time you destroy an enemy it explodes in a large circular detonation resembling a bursting balloon, and if these explosions come into contact with any other baddies they too go boom, leading to a rather satisfying chain reaction of pyrotechnics if timed correctly. Create a 'chain' of four or more enemy explosions and a fireball attack goes flying from your own play field into your opponent's half of the screen. Create multiple chains of six, eight, ten or more such blasts, and even more of these flaming meteors will descend on the poor hapless schmuck connected to joy-port two.

But wait, what's player two doing? Shooting your attacking fireballs and turning them round to come careering back to your side of the screen in a 'reflect attack', that's what. The cheeky blighter. Hang on though, if you can just blast the returning projectiles yourself and reflect them back again you'll be laughing. Oops, looks like one just landed on your character's head. Right, they're really going to get it this time. And therein lies the beauty of *Twinkle Star Sprites* in a competitive two-player mode. It's like Ping-Pong, with bullets. Two well-matched opponents can quickly create utter on-screen chaos and incredible competitive intensity when they get to grips with the game's subtleties, strategies and play techniques.

For instance, is it more advantageous to go for all-out attack and run the risk of your opponent reflecting your projectiles, now stronger, back to your side of the screen, or should you prime your 'charge' weapon, wait for them to attack first, then let them have it? Should you use one of your limited smart



» Player two eats bunny rabbit.

bombs to avoid a tricky attack pattern or try and counter it in the hope of catching your opponent off guard in the resulting deluge of return fire? And when is it best to charge your special 'boss attack', which leaves you defenceless for a few heart-stopping, precious seconds? This is the sumptuous cherry upon the icing of *Twinkle Star Sprites*' elaborately constructed cake. Each of the game's characters has their own personal 'boss', which they can call up and send into battle against their rival, either in the manner just mentioned or by countering a required number of enemy attacks. It's an absolutely genius idea, and there's little in gaming to compare with summoning an enormous flying pig or rabbit onto your opponents screen, which then proceeds to smash them out of existence. No, really, trust us on this.

It has to be said that *Twinkle Star Sprites* isn't nearly as much fun in one-player mode against the rather predictable CPU-controlled AI. Although it does score points in **Retro Gamer**'s eyes, by having one of its rival characters ridicule you to an extent dependent on the amount of credits you've used to reach him. As a two-player game, however, it's almost perfect, with wonderfully balanced competitive gameplay, and almost limitless replayability. And that's got to be worth the price of an import, hasn't it?



» Yes… it really is an enormous flying pig.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある



Year released: 1989 (US) 1990 (UK)

Original price: $189.95/£189.99

Buy it now for: £15+

Associated magazines: No dedicated commercial magazines, but there were many fanzines, most were based in the US including Portable Atari Gaming System and Wild Cat

Why the Lynx was great… With its great full-colour screen and addictive games, Lynx was ahead of its time. And although it had poor battery life, titles such as *Chip's Challenge*, *California Games* and *Klax* were worth charging them up for



RETROINSPECTION

ATARI LYNX

A FULL-COLOUR SCREEN, 16-BIT TECHNOLOGY AND ADDICTIVE GAMES. EPYX THOUGHT NINTENDO WOULD JUMP AT THE CHANCE OF SNAPPING UP 'THE HANDY', ITS FLEDGLING HANDHELD CONSOLE. BUT AS DAVID CROOKES REVEALS, EPYX WAS IN FOR A BIT OF SHOCK…

"Grab your suit and passport." Dave Needle looks up. It's three o'clock in the afternoon and standing in his office is David Morse, the CEO of Epyx, with an urgent look on his face. "I need you to join me on a flight to Japan. The plane leaves in three hours." Needle glances at his watch and then dashes home. Uncertain of exactly what is happening, he nevertheless grabs his best suit, takes his passport from his drawer and heads to San Francisco airport.

Morse and Epyx board member Joe Horowitz are waiting for him. They board the plane, making their way to the upper deck of the half-empty jumbo jet heading for the Land of the Rising Sun. As the plane takes off, Morse begins to explain what's happening. A private meeting has been set up with Nintendo head Shigeru Miyamoto, with one simple goal: selling the 'Handy'. The handhand console that Needle and colleague RJ Mical have been working on needs to be sold. Epyx doesn't have the available finances to take the product to market and it might just be possible that Nintendo can be persuaded to buy it and put it out as one of its own products.

As they snack on shrimp, cheese and caviar, Needle begins to feel uneasy. Something isn't quite right. 20 years on, he recalls exactly what he was thinking, "We didn't have a planned presentation", he says. "I felt it wasn't the sort of pitch that you made off the cuff. It would take a lot of work to present it properly. It was Japan. I'd dealt with this sort of stuff before, and if we were going to be on their playing field we must play by their rules." Needle's instinct was right. Horowitz was convinced that they would be able to force their way into Nintendo's pocket. And while Morse remained sceptical, he was powerless to call a halt to proceedings. The flight to Japan was to prove lengthy.

The meeting had been set up by Henk Rogers, a Dutch-born videogame designer and entrepreneur known for successfully winning the handheld and console licences of *Tetris* from the former Soviet Ministry of Software and Hardware. Rogers had snatched the rights from under the nose of *The Mirror* chief Robert Maxwell. At this moment in time, however, he was helping Epyx make its pitch. He

INSTANT EXPERT

The Lynx was the world's first colour handheld console and was initially sold with *California Games*.

It came packaged with a case, a ComLynx cable and AC adapter (later replaced by six rapidly depleting AA batteries).

The handheld was developed by Epyx using the talents of Dave Needle and RJ Mical and attracted Atari's interest even though both had been members of the Amiga design team.

Needle and Mical had based the Lynx developer's kit around an Amiga.

With a 3.5-inch screen, the Lynx visually packed a punch. The screen could even be flipped to allow for left or right-handed play.

There was a two-inch speaker (the Lynx II had two speakers) and an eight-directional joypad.

The console had two basic chips and they each had a name too: Mikey and Suzy. Aww. Both were 16-bit custom CMOS chips running at 16MHz and were run via an 8-bit CPU.

While Mikey ran the sound and video driver, Suzy looked after the blitter, sprite rendering and hardware scrolling.

Game cartridges could hold up to 2MB of data that was loaded into the Lynx's 64K of memory. Most of the cartridges, however, were 128K.

Up to 18 players could link up using the ComLynx cable as long as they had their own copy of the game. Infrared was going to be used initially.



ATARI LYNX



» A plastic mock-up of one of the alternative designs for the first Handy.



» In an attempt to boost sales, Atari reduced the price of the Lynx to just a whisker below $100.



» One of the many independently produced games by Songbird Productions.



» Cartridges came in several different forms: flat, ridged and curved lip (as above).

knew the president of Nintendo extremely well, and Epyx figured this would be a fundamental contact in the whole business.

What Epyx hadn't predicted, however, was the aggressive pitch put forward by Horowitz. "We were in the presence of Nintendo," Needle recalls. "Joe tried a hard sell, and as he spoke, David and I felt our faces turn red. It carried on for some time, and before long we were ordered out of the building. It was just too strong. Yet it didn't stop Joe – he got even louder. Luckily, Henk intervened and put an end to the pitch. Nintendo then allowed us to remain for a moment so the reps could show us something."

A pair of small boxes were brought into the room. They were placed upon a table and opened in front of us. Needle, Morse and Horowitz glanced across at each other nervously, uncertain of what was about to be revealed. Inside each box was a set of handheld videogame consoles. There was a communications cable that enabled them to be played together, and it was ready to go to market immediately. "We were the first non-Nintendo people to learn of the existence of the Nintendo Game Boy," Needle says, recoiling even at the memory. "We were crushed. Joe was infuriated. The Nintendo boss left the room and we just sat there, wondering what to do next."

"IT WAS JAPAN. I'D DEALT WITH THIS SORT OF STUFF BEFORE, AND IF WE WERE GOING TO BE ON THEIR PLAYING FIELD WE MUST PLAY BY THEIR RULES"

The Handy was an ambitious project. A full-colour, 16-bit handheld games console that was so far ahead of its time, it took 12 years before anyone bettered it. It was devised by Morse, Needle and Mical, working with a large, talented team at Epyx and had been drawn up on napkins in August 1986 while the trio were enjoying a meal in a plush little cafe in the affluent Foster City, California. They were already heavily involved in the computer industry: Morse had been the mastermind of the Amiga home computer, and RJ and Needle were members of that team and had played a large part in its creation. It was time to start something new.

"We were really intrigued by the idea of creating a handheld console," says Needle. "We knew it was possible and so we cracked on with it straight away." As for the 'Handy' name: "I can't remember how we got the name," says Mical. "Everyone was popping up with clever stuff in those days. They were heady times filled with promise and productivity. Man, we jammed."

Before long, Epyx had assembled a team large enough to look after the software, hardware, industrial design and audio facilities of the console. Morse, who had been installed as Epyx's CEO after founder Jim Connelley decided to leave, put the entire process together and led the project from the start.

The first prototype of the Epyx's handheld had a black-and-white screen. "But it didn't have the 'zing' we thought it ought to have," says Needle. "Many people in the group wanted us to stick to black and white. They said the cost, battery life, weight and viewability effects of changing to colour would hurt the product." Yet Needle and Mical stuck to their guns and the project shifted to colour – 4,096 of them, the same number as the Amiga. "It was a continuation but we weren't creating a handheld Amiga," says Mical. "The leading-edge display was the most expensive component, so the colour choice was one of economy." Needle adds: "If the low-cost glass and drivers would have supported a million colours, I would have done it." It was decided that the 65C02 chip would be used since it outperformed the rest and the Handy also became the first gaming console with hardware support for zooming and distortion of sprites. It allowed for fast pseudo three-dimensional games and made life easy for programmers.

"Many engineers knew it and would happily program in assembly for it," Mical says. "There was a large existing body of code because the 65C02 was in popular systems such as the Apple II and the Commodore 64. Best of all, though, it was cheap and fast. Needle explains: "I invented the technique for planar expansion/shrinking capability for an arcade game I had done several years before. It was a space alien/earth attack game with a 3D rotating planet, 3D giant robots, ground-tracking shadows and was pretty cool. We also came up with a way of avoiding filled polygons by taking a triangle and sizing it as you wished. It's not as great as a real polygon, but this way the surfaces had full texture all the time with absolutely no performance penalty."

While work progressed on the hardware, Epyx continued to produce videogames such as *Chip's Challenge* and a Handy department was created. At one point it was sealed off from the rest of the building for security purposes. It was decided that cartridges would be used for the games. Although there had been reports that games were going to be loaded from tape, Mical says there was no truth in them. "We did think about hard disk a little..."

Yet by the time the machine was ready, Epyx had hit financial problems. The Commodore 64 market, which was Epyx's core



» These pictures show the actual working emulation of the Handy used during prototype stages.

OTHER VERSIONS...

Lynx II

One of the hallmarks of the Atari Lynx (other than poor battery power and the ability to flip the screen upside down so that left-handers could play) was its size. It was enormous. So when Atari decided that competition from the more compact Game Boy meant that the Lynx needed a revamp, one of the first things it did was cut it down to size. But that's not all. As well as making the rubber hand-gripped Lynx II smaller, the battery power was enhanced, it added stereo sound and it had a power-saving pause option that turned off the improved screen. It was also cheaper, retailing at £99, although it didn't come with any accessories or a game. "By removing the games cartridge, we have brought the price down below the psychological £100 price point," Atari spokesman Peter Walker said at the time.



A Lynx To The TV

When the Atari Lynx was being created, the team pondered whether or not to enable it to be hooked up to a television. The idea was cast aside, however, because it was decided it would prove too limiting to the architecture if the handheld needed to produce a TV-compatible image. "Things like frame rate, aspect ratio, line count, colour saturation limits and so on were just too limiting," explained Dave Needle. "So we declared that no work would be done for any TV capability at all. The downside was that it was hard to do screenshots for the press. The upside had a surprise, in that Sharp, our first selection for the LCD manufacturer, had refused to help us because it feared that the final product could be used as a TV and thus hurt its LCD TV sales. The architectural impossibility of a TV version gave us the needed inroads. In the end, we used the Citizen LCD, although it had similar concerns." One idea to allow the Lynx to be used with a television was also rejected, mainly due to the fact that the Lynx screen was not up to broadcast standard.

COMMUNITY – ATARI WEBSITES TO WATCH

The Atari Times
www.ataritimes.com

Since 1996, this site has been an essential Atari resource and is packed with Lynx features, including reviews of both commercial and homebrew games. With reviews updated as and when new games arrive, the site is a brilliant place to start when reading up on the latest for the handheld.

Atari Age
www.atariage.com

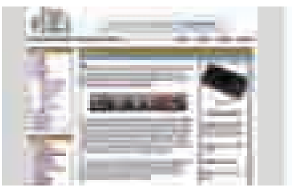
If you are trying to track down and play some games for your Lynx, Atari Age has not only a great many intricate details (from the three different cartridge styles and company profiles to tips and cheats), it also has an excellent rarity guide, listing every Lynx game created. Not to mention its bustling forum.

Songbird Productions
http://songbird-productions.com

When the Atari Lynx died a commercial death, its fan base took over in much the same way as with the majority of retro machines. Songbird Productions was set up in 1999 to produce games such as *Loopz* and *Total Carnage* for the Lynx and Jaguar. You can also browse through its catalogue via the website.

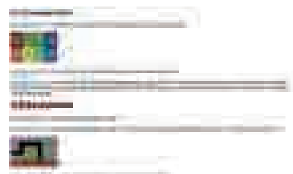
Matthias Domin's Atari Lynx page
www.mdgames.de/lynx_eng.htm

If you're pretty nifty in the coding department, then Matthias Domin has put together a fine selection of tools that will be of great assistance when taking the initial steps and using your talents to create new Lynx content. There are also some little games on there to try out.









audience, wasn't pulling in the cash any more. It had also invested in VCR games but with little success. Staff levels were falling from around two hundred at its peak to just 20 employees. If the Handy was ever going to be released it would need the backing of another company. Hence, the ill-fated journey that led the group to knock at the hallowed doors of Nintendo…

When that fell through, Horowitz decided to approach Atari, and made a phone call to Jack Tramiel, the chief executive at that time. Atari had already tried its hand at producing a portable machine, the Atari 2200, which was based on the Atari 2600. But it just couldn't seem to get it right. As time went on, however, Atari began to ignore the growing stature of consoles and had become heavily involved in a business war against Commodore. Tramiel finally realised the worth of consoles when the NES stormed onto the market – so he was rather taken by the Handy, believing it to be a great way back to console dominance.

Soon after Horowitz approached Atari, Jack's son, Sam, went to Epyx. He was greeted by Joe and showed around. They then sat in an office and discussed some terms. It was eventually decided that Atari would manufacture and market the handheld console and Epyx would create the videogames, getting paid by Atari for each title that was produced. However, in the contract was a clause that issued Epyx a deadline. For example, the company had 60 days to fix any bugs that Atari said needed to be rectified. Needle says: "Atari routinely waited until the end of the Epyx time period to comment on the Epyx fixes. There was then inadequate time for Epyx to make the fixes." According to Needle, Atari decided to "punish" Epyx by withholding payment. In the end, this sent Epyx into financial turmoil, leading to its inevitable bankruptcy. Atari did hold out a lifeline – paying Epyx, but only on the condition that it handed over the Handy.

The deal obviously upset Mical and Needle. They asked their lawyers if they could leave Epyx, but they were advised that it would be seen as an overt action by them to damage Atari and that they would almost certainly be sued. The pair remained at Epyx until the hardware handover was complete, turning down an offer from Sam to work at Atari.

With Morse, Mical and Needle's involvement in the project coming to an abrupt halt, Atari took the Handy and renamed it the 'Lynx'. It was two years before the company released the console in September 1989 however, and by that time Nintendo's Game Boy had also been released. "Looking back, if we had decided not to go colour," says Needle, "We would have been a zero. The Game Boy really would have trounced us." As it was, the colour feature of the Lynx kept the machine in the limelight, although it wasn't plain sailing. The Lynx cost $189.95 and the Game Boy retailed for $89.95. Many felt the Lynx was too expensive at the time and there was a vicious circle of too few purchases, putting off third-party developers, which, in turn, lead to fewer and fewer purchases.

As sales continued to fall, Atari tweaked the machine and created the Lynx II. It retailed for half the price of the original, and was smaller and cheaper to make and it had the addition of stereo sound, as well as better battery life and a pause option that allowed the screen to be turned off, thus saving power.

Needle wasn't too convinced with the changes, however. "During the handover, [Atari's] mechanical engineer made some seemingly pointless changes," he said. "The guy told me that he always liked to put a piece of himself in any product he worked on. He changed the backlight electronics and the transformer design and reduced the battery life. But he also changed the high voltage capacitor to one with considerably more leakage at the oscillation frequency and it generated considerable heat. The new load on the batteries caused them to overheat." Nevertheless, sales picked up and it seemed Atari was onto a winner.

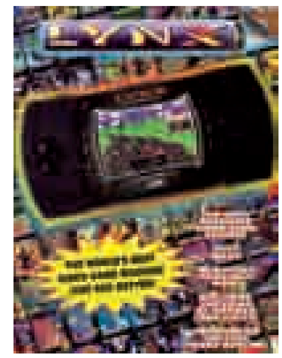
Then along came Sega, who introduced us to the Game Gear in 1991. For Lynx, this meant the end was nigh. Although the Lynx remained the superior machine, the Game Gear benefited from Sega's advertising drive and the Japanese company's resources. What was more frustrating was Game Gear's similarities to Lynx.

"Game Gear was an interesting issue," Needle remembers. "Sega was shown all of the Handy's innards and schematics and specs as part of an attempt to partner with them after the Epyx marketing fiasco. And to see what I consider to be pretty much a copy of the Handy was a bit infuriating." He continues, "I had become friends with one of the engineers at Sega, and during the last development stages of the Game Gear, after I had already left Epyx, Sega hired me to help with a few lingering product issues. I went to their Japan facility and they showed me the problems they were having. Some issues were just weak engineering on their part, showing me that they did not understand the functionality of the hardware they were copying. They had the output palette wrong, among other things."

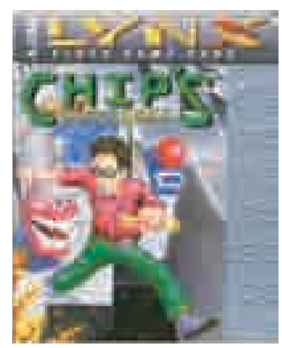
Despite the problems, Dave Needle remains proud of the Lynx – "always have, always will", he says. Among his favourite games for the once groundbreaking handheld are *Chip's Challenge*, *Gates Of Zendocon* and *California Games*. "It's a matter of pride that no one created anything better for 12 years," he adds. When it comes to what went wrong, Mical maintains that, "All the Lynx needed was low cost and a huge library of software. But I place the blame for both of these in Atari's lap…"



» *Checkered Flag* was a top racer for the Lynx and highly sought after.



» Atari's Lynx catalogue showed off the large number of games.



» Wonderful puzzle game *Chip's Challenge* was one of the Lynx's most endearing titles.



» Colourful and pretty games such as *Toki* made full use of the colour capabilities of the Lynx.

Anti Red-Eye

Although RJ Mical was happy with the Lynx, saying, "We got exactly what we set out to create", one feature he would have liked was infrared. Named RedEye, the infrared capability was demonstrated in the lab but it was decided to go for the ComLynx instead. "RedEye would have been cool," says Mical. "You would need to maintain 'line of sight' between players, though, and that could have been a problem. We dreaded the feared 'crossing legs' boy who would cross his legs and block his unit from the network."

ATARI LYNX

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It may have been KO'd by the Game Boy, but Atari's Lynx was still home to some wonderful games and arcade conversions. Don't believe us? Then check this lovely little selection of classics out.



01

CHIP'S CHALLENGE

RELEASED: 1989

DEVELOPED BY: EPYX

BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: SUMMER GAMES

01 Puzzle games are almost two a penny on the Atari Lynx, but when the quality is as good as *Chip's Challenge* you don't tend to mind them cluttering up the console (or your perfect ten columns for that matter). While the concept itself is not particularly original (you basically have to move Chip around each maze in search of a set amount of computer chips) it has been put together with so much love, care and attention that you can't help but become smitten with it. Chip himself may be only a few pixels high, but he's full of character and you can't help but feel for him as he carries out his tricky quest. It may have been ported over to a number of different machines since its release, but the bite-size puzzles make this perfect fodder for Atari's handheld.

KLAX

RELEASED: 1990

DEVELOPED BY: ATARI

BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: GAUNTLET

02 *Klax* is easily deserving of a place in our top ten and it's not just because it features the sexiest videogame voice of all time (if you know someone who sounds sexier send us an email). Converted from the popular Tengen coin-op, *Klax* is an almost perfect arcade adaptation that not only captures the authenticity of the original arcade game but also proves that the Lynx was no slouch when it came to hosting great puzzlers. Deceptively simple to pick up – all you have to do is stack three tiles of the same colour on top of each other, either horizontally, vertically or digonally – *Klax* is perfect proof that you didn't need to own a handheld with a monochrome screen in order to appreciate one of the world's best puzzle games. and yes, that does mean we like this just as much as Tetris. Ooh, controversy…



02

RAMPART

RELEASED: 1991

PUBLISHED BY: ATARI

BY THE SAME PUBLISHER: BATTLEZONE

03 It might not match the majesty of its arcade parent, but there's still plenty to love about this extremely slick Lynx conversion. While it suffers from the obvious lack of a trackball, it still plays surprisingly well and doesn't let you down on later levels once the action speeds up. The mix of *Tetris*-styled wall building and strategic blasting works perfectly and makes for a very unique experience. It's a lot tougher than the arcade original (mainly because all of the enemy ships can now drop off ground forces) and the loss of the third player is a bit of a shame (the Lynx should easily be able to handle it), but this is otherwise another cracking conversion and a healthy addition to the Lynx's library.

LEMMINGS

RELEASED: 1993

PUBLISHED BY: ATARI

BY THE SAME PUBLISHER: PAPERBOY

04 *Lemmings* has appeared on virtually every console and computer that has ever been made, so it should come as no surprise that the loveable mop-tops can also be found on the Atari Lynx. What is surprising, though, is just how good an adaptation of *Lemmings* this actually is. Despite the small screen and lack of a mouse there are no problems with this spot-on conversion. Your little fellas are perfectly animated and full of character, the levels are easy to navigate and it's incredibly easy to select each class. In fact, the only thing that is likely to put fans off is that you're going to be extremely unlikely to find a copy of the game for under £60.

S.T.U.N. RUNNER

RELEASED: 1991

DEVELOPED BY: ATARI

BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: CHAMPIONSHIP SPRINT

05 If anyone doubts the power of Atari's Lynx, simply shove a copy of *S.T.U.N. Runner* under their noses and watch them go into serious denial (we've tried it and it's fun). While it obviously can't hope to match the insane slickness and plentiful polygons of the arcade original (we still have dreams about that sleek, sexy cab), this Lynx conversion is amazingly polished and perfectly captures the atmosphere of its larger peer. Granted it's far more unforgiving than its bigger brother – you'll find the controls a little sensitive to begin with – and the gameplay is rather simplistic, but if you're looking for a thrilling racer on Atari's handheld you won't find anything better.



03



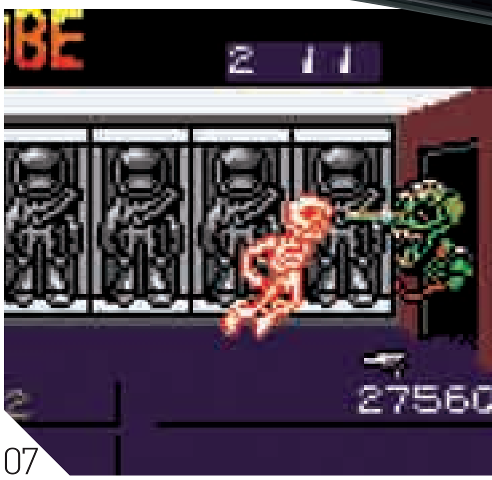
04



05




06


07


08

BLUE LIGHTNING

RELEASED: 1989

DEVELOPED BY: EPYX

BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

06 *Blue Lightning* may well have been one of the earliest titles to show off the Lynx's graphical grunt, but that's not to say it wasn't a superb game in its own right. Essentially Atari's answer to *After Burner* and *Star Fox*, *Blue Lightning* put you at the stick of an advanced military jet and required you to shoot down wave upon wave upon wave of enemy fighters. Sure it gets repetitive, but the action is always fast and frantic, the nine levels have a variety of nice environments to fly through and the scaling effects are truly fantastic. If you're looking for a good blaster then set your sights on *Blue Lightning*. It's far better than our rather naff pun.

XENOPHOBE

RELEASED: 1992

PUBLISHED BY: ATARI

BY THE SAME PUBLISHER: BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

07 While the Lynx had many fine conversions, it was only really *Xenophobe* that managbed to notably improve on its arcade original. For starters, the controls were streamlined and far easier to use (the arcade's three-button joystick was quite cumbersome), new items like the jetpack enabled you to fly around the space station without taking damage, while several new multiplayer modes kept the gameplay fresh and exciting. Add in some cartoony visuals that perfectly mimicked their arcade parent's and the end result is a highly enjoyable multiplayer experience that proves hunting down aliens can actually be a lot of fun.

ALPINE GAMES

RELEASED: 2004

DEVELOPED BY: DURANIK

BY THE SAME PUBLISHER: NATIVE DEMO

08 Normally we wouldn't cover a homebrew title in our perfect ten for fear of upsetting people, but *Alpine Games* is so brilliant that it would have been criminal not to include it. Essentially a homage to Epyx's sports games of old (why only *California Games* was released on the Lynx is beyond us), *Alpine Games* ups the ante considerably by featuring nine different events, nifty digitised music and some astounding-looking visuals that push the Lynx further than we've ever seen. The bobsleigh, in particular, looks absolutely amazing, but it's the finely balanced gameplay that really manages to impress. It may cost over £20, but no Lynx owner should be without this fantastic title.


09

TODD'S ADVENTURES IN SLIME WORLD

RELEASED: 1992

PUBLISHED BY: EPYX

BY THE SAME PUBLISHER: WINTER GAMES

09 We were going to go with *Bill And Ted*, but we decided that *Todd's Adventures* is slightly better (it was a really close call, though). Anyway, *Slime World* sees you thrown into a series of caverns in search of precious Slime Gems. Sadly for Todd, *Slime World* is literally covered in gross icky enemies, so you'll need to constantly keep his water gun filled up so you can clean up the pulsating planet. Like many Lynx titles, *Slime World* is very pretty and the slime-coated caverns that Todd explores are constantly in motion. *Slime World* itself is absolutely huge and it will take an age to fully explore this *Metroid*-styled adventure.

ZARLOR MERCENARY

RELEASED: 1990

DEVELOPED BY: EPYX

BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: CALIFORNIA GAMES

10 With *Robotron: 2084* just missing out due to its overly complex control system, *Zarlor Mercenary* quickly swoops in and deservedly steals the last position in our prestigious top ten. Set across six huge and incredibly varied levels, *Zarlor Mercenary* doesn't do anything astoundingly new, but what it does do is exceptionally well polished. Destroyed enemies release coins that can then be spent on power-ups, there are some genuinely tough bosses to topple and the pseudo-3D visuals used throughout the game are very effective. There's even a superb multiplayer option that enables you to team up with three other pilots to take on the enemy forces together. Truely cracking stuff.


10

Special thanks to AtariAge.com for providing screenshots

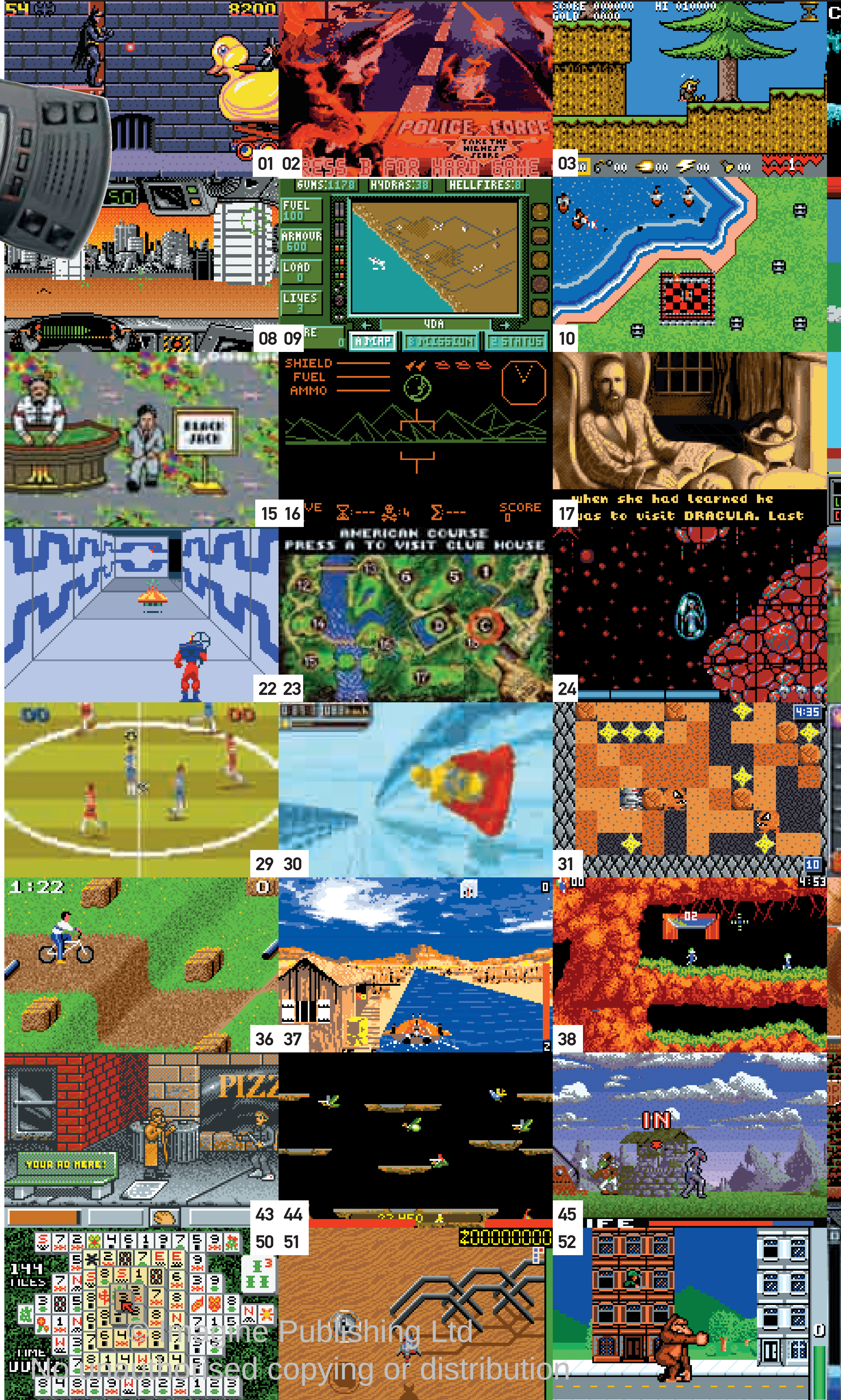


ATARI LYNX

and the rest...

So what if it was steam rollered by Nintendo? There were still some choice (and not so choice) games available for Atari's gigantic handheld. Just check out the following two pages if you don't believe us

1 BATMAN BEGINS
2 PINBALL JAM
3 VIKING CHILD
4 TODD'S ADVENTURES IN SLIME WORLD
5 NINJA GAIDEN III: ANCIENT SHIP OF DOOM
6 CHIP'S CHALLENGE
7 GORDO 106
8 BATTLEWHEELS
9 DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF
10 RAMPART
11 WARBIRDS
12 FAT BOBBY
13 CHECKERED FLAG
14 STEEL TALONS
15 LYNX CASINO
16 BATTLEZONE 2000
17 DRACULA THE UNDEAD
18 HARD DRIVIN'
19 BLUE LIGHTNING
20 ELECTROCOP
21 PAC-LAND
22 XYBOTS
23 AWESOME GOLF
24 BUBBLE TROUBLE
25 JIMMY CONNORS' TENNIS
26 KUNG FOOD
27 SCRAPYARD DOG
28 POWER FACTOR
29 WORLD CLASS FUSSBALL
30 ALPINE GAMES
31 CRYSTAL MINES II
32 ISHIDO: THE WAY OF STONES
33 ROBO-SQUASH
34 DOUBLE DRAGON
35 MS PAC-MAN
36 CALIFORNIA GAMES
37 HYDRA
38 LEMMINGS
39 SUPER OFF-ROAD
40 TOURNAMENT CYBERBALL 2072
41 XENOPHOBE
42 A.P.B.
43 DIRTY LARRY: RENEGADE COP
44 JOUST
45 SHADOW OF THE BEAST
46 NINJA GAIDEN
47 BASKETBRAWL
48 PAPERBOY
49 ROBOTRON: 2084
50 SHANGHAI
51 ZARLOR MERCENARY
52 RAMPAGE
53 BLOCKOUT
54 PIT-FIGHTER
55 ROADBLASTERS
56 SWITCHBLADE II




OMPUTER MAP
04
05
06
LEVEL 001 TIME: 088 CHIPS LEFT: 010
07
11
12
13
LAP 1 POS 1
14
18
19
20
TIME LEFT: 59:42:34
SCORE: 0
21
1UP HIGH SCORE
25
26
27
28
ROUND
32
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XENOPHOBE
SELF DESTRUCT 03
MACHINE
42
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IKARI WARRIORS

IKARI WARRIORS NEVER SAY DIE!



- » **PUBLISHER:** ELITE
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



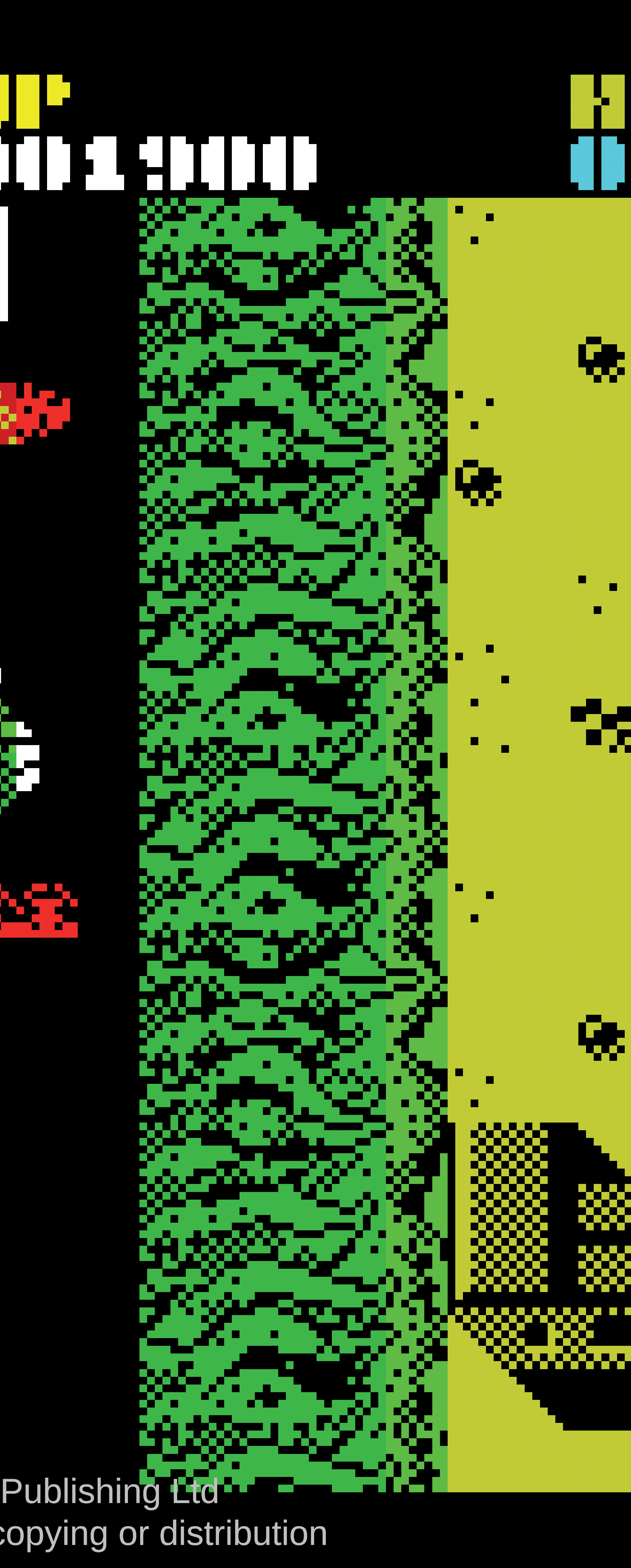
HISTORY

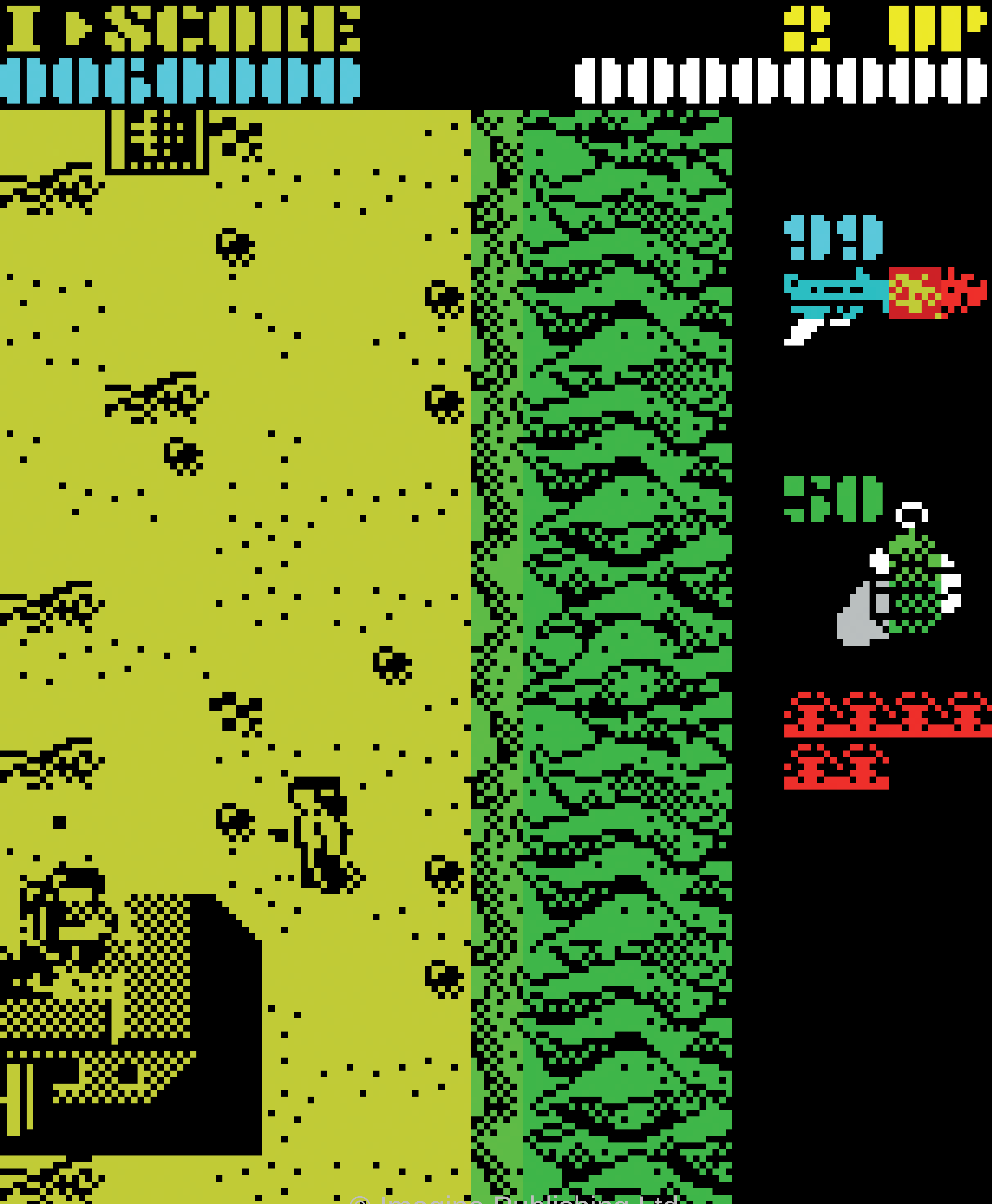
You've got to hand it to Elite – managing to squeeze the action-packed arcade smash *Ikari Warriors* onto a whole cassette tape without creating any casualties of war is truly worthy of a medal of honour.

For the unaware, *Ikari Warriors* is a top-down run-and-gun, crafted by SNK in the vein of *Commando*. In fact, the games are so spookily similar that many people often believe them to be brethren. Never let one of those *Ikari*-twins hear you spout such nonsensical jibba jabba, though; these pint-sized heroes are made of stern stuff. Just an angry glare or a flaring nostril from one of their faces would probably cause a cockroach to spontaneously combust on the spot. And they are likely to become so enraged at your stupidity that one of them would probably venture into a warzone to commandeer a tank, while the other crushed it into a large iron dunce-cap to perch on top of your ashes.

When faced with a road teeming with enemy solders, heavily fortified bunkers and panzershreks, these guys simply take stock of one bullet belt and a colourful bandana, and walk, unhinged, through the middle of the ensuing chaos. Yep, they have no time for strategy and planning, they view that pointless exercise as time better spent pummelling extra militia into burgers.

To get the best out of *Ikari Warriors* it's best to play it with a friend. The enjoyable co-op option, vehicle borrowing and deft firing system – that allowed you to toggle between running and strafing fire – gave it a slight edge over its Capcom rival, with the Spectrum version being one of the finest home ports available. I remember vividly the panic dashes to the tank and backing up your pal with suppressing fire. It offered fun by the bunker-load and marks the lynchpin of a classic gaming grenade that is just itching to be pulled again.




SCORE
2 UP

THE MAKING OF...

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

Damien McFerran selflessly puts a comforting arm around the weary shoulders of former Mirage designer Sean Naden and proceeds to ply him with copious amounts of cinder toffee and fizzy pop until he reveals the entire sorry saga of one of the most lamentable videogames of all time





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** TIME WARNER

» **DEVELOPER:** MIRAGE

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **GENRE:** 2D FIGHTER

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+ (FORMAT PRICES VARY)

Ordinarily, when we choose to investigate a game here at Retro Gamer it's usually one that is held in high regard. However, to demonstrate our unpredictability, we're covering a game that is almost universally reviled as opposed to revered; a game that so gravely offended *Amiga Power* magazine that one staff member was moved to describe it as, "The nearest the software industry has come to robbing an elderly deaf woman in a wheelchair – whose son has just died in a car accident returning from the funeral of his father and sister, killed when their ancestral home burned to the ground – and then severely beating her. With the diseased family pet." Ouch. The game on the receiving end was Mirage's *Rise Of The Robots*.

One of the most excessively hyped videogames of all time, *Rise* was supposed to herald a new era of graphical opulence while simultaneously revolutionising the one-on-one fighting genre – then at the height of its popularity thanks to arcade smash hits *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*. When you consider that it ultimately achieved neither of these things and consequently went on to become infamous for the frosty critical reception it garnered, it's perfectly understandable that the team behind the game are extremely reluctant to break their decade-long silence and spill the beans on what went so horribly askew. But here at **Retro Gamer** we're loath to give in so easily and after a bit of cajoling and harassment we managed to converse with possibly the most significant member of the *Rise* team – the man behind the incredible visuals that permitted the game to build up such a whirlwind of frenzied anticipation.

Sean Naden isn't your typical videogame designer. While studying at Sunderland Polytechnic he wasn't exactly enamoured with the notion of spending all day sitting in front of a PC monitor. "During my course I remember thinking what a tedious pain in the arse it would be to do computer stuff for a living and consequently spent most of my time down the pub," he reveals. Unfortunately, once he had completed his studies the harsh realities of life came knocking. Prior to working on *Rise* he found himself in something of a tight spot. "I'd left poly and had been looking for work over the summer," he explains. "I'd been offered jobs with meagre wages



» One of the design sketches Naden produced for the game – this would eventually evolve into the 'Military' robot.



» When your robot is defeated its true origin is revealed – gasp!

– so low that I couldn't actually afford to take them." Luckily, help was at hand. "A friend of my partner told her that a local job centre had an advert from a games company called Mirage and they were looking for an artist."

An interview was quickly arranged and Naden was invited to visit Mirage HQ. "They showed me a design package called 3D Studio and asked if I could use it," he recalls. "I'd never heard of it, so I promptly lied and said I could use AutoCAD – which I'd also never used but had seen in action for about 15 minutes about two years previous." Although Naden was being more than a little economical with the truth, his flagrant fibbing helped to at least give him a fighting chance of landing the job. To his surprise, the previous indifference he had felt towards computer design dissolved as soon as Mirage revealed the kind of stuff it was working on. "I remember they showed me a crude segmented robot hand which looked astonishing for the time, then they showed it move and I was utterly blown away," he remembers. "I said 'Wow! Look at that!' quite excitedly, which must have been the right thing to say at the time." After doodling an on-the-spot concept design of a 'large robot gorilla' an astonished Naden was offered the position. "Somehow I got a job to design robots for a fighting game and they were actually going to pay me £10,000 a year to do it," he reveals. "Who said that drawing spaceships and robots was a complete waste of time?"

Although he was initially employed to provide the hand-drawn concept artwork for the game, Naden's responsibilities soon escalated. "The company Mirage hired to build the 3D models was so awful I decided I needed to do it myself, so I learnt 3D Studio," he remembers. "I simply couldn't allow any of the out-sourced material to be used because it was so poor. However, not many people were doing this stuff then; 3D designers were like rocking horse shit."

Naden was now the key player when it came to the 'look' of this ambitious videogame. For influences he instinctively turned to Japanese animation. "I loved *G-Force* when I was a kid," he recalls, somewhat misty eyed. "You have to remember that anime was not as mainstream as it is now, but videogamers knew it well and so did the rest of the *Rise* team so it was obvious we needed to represent it within the game. Mecha-series Patlabor was one of my favourites so one robot (The Sentry) carried those sorts of design themes."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RISE 2: RESURRECTION
SYSTEMS: PC, PLAYSTATION, SEGA SATURN
YEAR: 1996

BEDLAM (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1996





» The PC version is the definitive edition of the game – the hi-res visuals are impressive – just don't pick up the joystick…



» Each victory is proceeded by a scene showing your fallen adversary.



THE MAKING OF...

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

MAY DAY

Although *Rise* featured a particularly slender layer of melodious accompaniment (the small amount of music that was included was produced by Richard Joseph, who sadly lost his fight with lung cancer in March of this year), Mirage managed to secure the services of astrology nutcase and part-time Queen rocker Brian May, who wrote and performed the song *Cyborg* to coincide with the release of the game. Yes, Brian May was still credible back in the Nineties. "One of Mirage's bosses was a total Queen nut," explains Naden. "So he wanted Brian May to compose some music for the game. Mr May was actually a dead-nice chap. I recall he let me strum his Red Special… I should point out that this was his home-made guitar. Apparently he built it with his dad out of an old fireplace. You cant make this stuff up, can you?" You can say that again.



As development on the game progressed the specialist press began to sit up and take notice – largely thanks to the exemplary CGI work Naden was producing. Comparisons were drawn between *Rise* and *Street Fighter II* – at that point the benchmark of 2D fighting brilliance. Publisher Time Warner quickly pounced on this perception and subsequent promotional material boasted that *Rise* would represent the zenith of the genre, effortlessly trouncing Capcom's title in terms of depth, challenge and artificial intelligence.

While it's hard to imagine that Time Warner came up with these haughty claims completely on its own, Naden insists that – to his knowledge, at least – the development team never set its sights that high. "I hadn't played *Street Fighter II*," he admits sheepishly. "The only similar game I had played was *Barbarian* on the Spectrum when I was a kid in the Eighties. The main game designer (ex-Bitmap Brother, Sean Griffiths) had played *Street Fighter II* quite a lot but he actually wanted *Rise* to be far less ambitious and more akin to *Barbarian*. It was never seriously considered to be a *Street Fighter II* rival by the design team, at least."



» The ill-advised Game Gear version in all its lurid glory.

"COMPARISONS WERE DRAWN BETWEEN RISE AND STREET FIGHTER II… PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL BOASTED THAT RISE WOULD REPRESENT THE ZENITH OF THE GENRE"

However, gameplay wasn't Naden's primary concern and he busied himself with making *Rise* look as impressive as possible. "It was easy for me to keep my head down and try to do the best job I could," he says. *Rise* certainly turned heads thanks to Naden's skill, and he argues that the unique designs found within the game were largely down to the fact that he wasn't a hardcore videogamer. "I think the look was something new as I wasn't using games as a benchmark, but was looking at films that I liked or looked good at the time," he explains. "Stuff like *Tron*, *Lawnmower Man*, *Terminator 2* – plus other classic sci-fi like *Blade Runner*, which still has to be beaten in terms of a viable futuristic environment. Things may have been different if I'd been a gamer, but being from 'outside the box' seemed to work. In addition, I had no idea how good the competition was, so I thought this method of design was the norm."

Time Warner was keen to capitalise on the ever-increasing media interest and wasted no time in inviting the specialist press to the Mirage HQ. "We had to stop work every five minutes as the next bus load of journalists was swiftly shown through the studio," recalls Naden. "It seemed that every magazine at the time had an exclusive." The level of exposure actually had a profoundly negative effect on the development of the game. "I was forever having to re-render newer shots for promotional work instead of working on the game," laments Naden. "But to be fair, the bosses at Time Warner were just cashing in on the fact that whoever saw it wanted it. *Rise* looked good and the press was being told that it was 'better than *Street Fighter II*'. It just goes to show what suckers these people must have been."

» To squeeze the game onto weaker hardware Naden had to reduce sprite quality – as shown in this Mega Drive screenshot.



» Taking inspiration from *Terminator 2*, the final boss in *Rise* is a shape-shifting killing machine known as 'The Supervisor.'





» The SNES port looked half-decent but retained the terribly broken gameplay.

The management at Time Warner seriously believed it was onto something big and its keenness to exploit the lucrative potential of the product resulted in it being ported to almost every available format of the era. "On the art side, a great deal of problems arrived purely because it was so easy for the management to sell," says Naden. "It was a new kind of eye candy and everyone seemed to want a piece." This cross-platform malarkey put the team at Mirage under intense strain, but Time Warner casually brushed such concerns aside. "The marketing division of Time Warner boasted that they could sell turds with the packaging we had given them," chuckles Naden. He valiantly attempted to shoehorn the lush next-generation visuals into creaking, archaic hardware like the Nintendo Game Boy and Sega Master System, with less than satisfactory results. "The promo shots I did for the press worked really well, but I feel many of the in-game graphics on certain formats didn't look good – the complicated high-resolution sprites were awful in low resolution," he explains. "Even the Amiga version looked blocky and piss-poor, but short of redesigning them all I had to go along with it."

Of course the visuals were only one part of the puzzle – Time Warner had also boasted that *Rise* would showcase 'revolutionary' artificial intelligence that would learn and adapt to the way the player fought. Naden scoffs at this particularly lofty claim and reveals that the reality was far different. "The AI wasn't even tested properly," he reveals. "We had a small team of local teenagers on the job – they were certainly not professionals. They ensured the game didn't crash too much, but gameplay was a largely unknown factor that the bosses at Time Warner had not concerned themselves with or even attempted to understand."

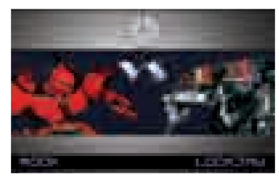
As the release date loomed the Mirage team was shocked to discover just how high the level of expectancy was for *Rise*. "I could never have imagined that the game would receive the attention it did," Naden says. "I wasn't familiar with the gaming press and didn't read any games magazines or even play many videogames at that point, but *Rise* was probably one of the largest ever marketing campaigns for a computer game up to that time."

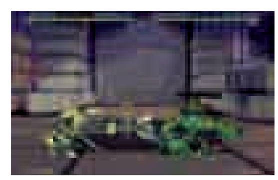
Amid the groundswell of hype, seeds of doubt were starting to appear within Mirage itself. As Naden's primary focus was the look of the product he was almost oblivious to the dire state the game was in, but he knew something was amiss. "The few times I played the game were merely to test the graphics so I naively took it for granted that it was so poor because it was just a test version and everything would be sorted out before release," he explains. "I suppose it was also naivety and lack of experience that myself and others didn't bring it up as an issue. It was just a case of a small, inexperienced company that got out of its depth."

To ensure the pre-release excitement reached a satisfying crescendo, several magazines (which shall remain nameless) granted an 'early' build of *Rise* stunningly positive reviews. Naden was amazed – but for the wrong reasons. "These journalists hadn't even played it," he says. "I can only speculate that there must have been pressure applied." Regardless, it was clear to Naden that the end product was going to fall way short of expectations. "It was virtually impossible to live up to

I AM THE RESURRECTION

After the unmitigated disaster of the first game, you'd have forgiven the Mirage team for wanting to distance itself from the ill-fated project. However, as Naden reveals, the members were keen to stay employed and development soon began on *Rise 2: Resurrection*, which eventfully saw release in 1996. "Many of the problems found in the original were rectified when the sequel was released," says Naden. "I don't feel it was because we all had something to prove with *Rise 2* – it was more about survival, trying to rescue the brand and keep our jobs. Acclaim, who published the second game, helped out loads. Mirage was in a bubble of its own bullshit for the first one, but *Rise 2* wasn't that bad." Sadly, the quality of the sequel was largely irrelevant thanks to the critical mauling the predecessor received – something the press and general public alike had not forgotten. "What goes around comes around and the game couldn't resurrect the brand," jokes Naden. "It should have been called 'Rise 2: Sorry About the First One.'"





» The stunning environments were created by Kwan Lee, who was a professional interior designer prior to joining the Mirage team.





RISE OF THE ROBOTS



» The Amiga port suffered from a sharp drop in clarity, resulting in a rather blocky appearance.



» An example of some of the good-looking graphics, unfortunately, the gameplay wasn't quite as impressive.

SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

The list of problems with *Rise* is as long as your arm, but here are a few of the more serious ones. Compared to rival games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II* – which both offered a rich and varied roster of fighters – *Rise* only allowed you to play as one character in single-player mode. The game engine was hilariously broken, with the player unable to jump over their opponent (this was done to save on animation frames). The supposedly revolutionary AI could be beaten by using just one move (this was fortunate, in a way, as the player had only a handful of attacks at their disposal). Instead of using different buttons for punch and kick strengths (as in *Street Fighter II*), Mirage decided to utilise a power gauge system, where holding the button down performed stronger moves. Needless to say, this robbed the game of any spontaneity it might have possessed.



the hype," he recalls. "I don't think the game could have ever kept up with what people were being shown in magazines and more importantly the sheer bullshit that was being written."

Indeed, the infamous 'positive reviews' only made the subsequent storm harder to bear for the *Rise* team.

When the game was eventually released in 1994 it was duly put to the sword and received unanimously dreadful reviews – culminating in an abysmal 5% (yes, five) rating in *Amiga Power*. While Naden isn't going to defend the dire end product, he feels that the level of expectation, combined with an overzealous publisher – more concerned with whipping up interest rather than ensuring the final product was decent – had blown things completely out of proportion. "*Rise* was very basic, in that you played the hero fighting opponents that became ever more dangerous," explains Naden. "The marketing people had promised it would outclass *Street Fighter II*, but because of this linear style it just couldn't compete. Time Warner was trying to sell the game and had a list of unique selling points to help it compete in the marketplace, sadly gameplay didn't rate too high on that list. Nobody selling and marketing the game had any experience of 2D fighters."

So, were the publishers ultimately to blame for the failure of *Rise Of The Robots*? Naden thinks for a moment – it's obviously a question he's been asked more than once in the past. "Would *Rise* have been better if Time Warner knew what the hell they were doing? Well, I suppose it was like the blind leading the blind," he explains. "It was not the most pressured project I have worked on, let's put it that way. Ironically, this was largely due to lack of experience within the overall team. By rights, Time Warner should have been kicking our arses, but we were left to our own devices."

> "IT WAS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO LIVE UP TO THE HYPE. I DON'T THINK THE GAME COULD HAVE EVER KEPT UP WITH WHAT PEOPLE WERE BEING SHOWN IN MAGAZINES" SEAN NADEN

Working on one of the biggest turkeys in videogame history was a true baptism of fire for Naden, who is now involved in freelance design after briefly plying his trade at Traveller's Tales, Infogrames and Evolution Studios. "I decided back in 2002 to go solo and set up working for myself," he says. "Most of my work comes from marketing and promotional work. It would seem I got plenty of experience of marketing and promotional work with *Rise*." Naden has produced 3D work for companies such as Rolls Royce, BBC, Carlton, Warner Bros and BAE Systems, as well as maintaining good links within the games industry via companies such as Climax, Sony and Blitz Games – a selection of his work can be found at www.seannaden.net. Despite the stigma attached to *Rise* he's still proud of the work he did on the game. "It was my first go at game graphics and in that respect it made quite an impact. It just goes to show the importance of how something looks," he concludes.

» The Cyborg is the central protagonist of the game – check out that six-pack, he must work out.

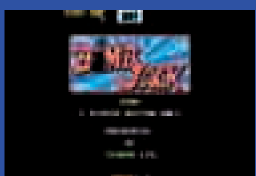


THE CLASSIC GAME

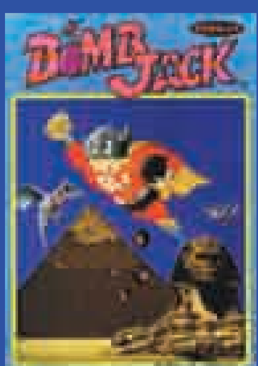
BOMB JACK

Bomb-disposal-by-touch is a pretty lame superpower whichever way you choose to look at it. But, back in the Eighties, when the world's tourist commissions were threatened by intergalactic bombers, only one man could come to their rescue…

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** TECMO
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £45+(PCB BOARD)







Life changed dramatically for Bomb Jack in 1984. Before then he was simply an underused, unappreciated superhero, living on his sofa and wallowing in self-pity and empty packets of popcorn. Then, one day, his letter box opened. "Hey little buddy, it's Spider-Man here. I'm heading into town with the Green Lantern and we thought that you might wanna come along, you know, get out of the house for a bit?" Jack flicked on the television to drown out his friend's plea. "This just in," squawked the panicky news presenter. "A heinous group of crooks resembling spaceships, birds and mummies have planted numerous oversized bombs at various important landmarks. If there is anyone out there who can help in our plight to stop these indiscriminate abominations, then please call this freephone number immediately…" It took a while to register with Jack. But when it did he picked up the phone, jumped in the shower and headed for Egypt.

Most will remember *Bomb Jack*. It's not difficult really – a little guy in red spandex darting around a sphinx, avoiding aliens and collecting bombs is not something you tend to forget easily. But there are always some aspects of classic games that will leave you. The smaller details, its quirks, those little moments of joy that a long hiatus and the visuals of current-gen gaming will help you to forget, and *Bomb Jack* is no different.

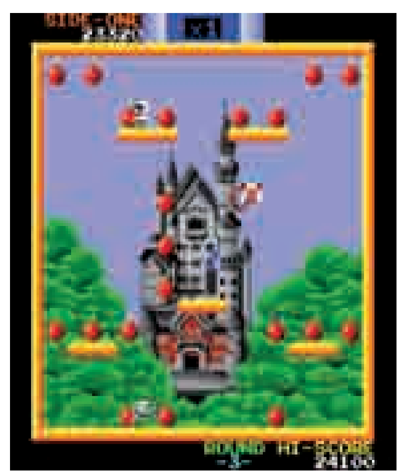
While its single-screen setup – showing a famous landmark rebuilt in multi-hued sprites, cluttered with platforms and cartoon bombs – might look dated when perched alongside a NAOMI arcade machine, its gameplay feels anything but. Tecmo's concept of merging the platform and puzzle genre is one of the finest examples of how to create a decent genre mash-up ever. Benefiting from a superhero mascot who holds the weight of the world's tourist trade on his minuscule shoulders, *Bomb Jack* was an arcade game that had character, accessibility, humour and enjoyment by the bucket load.

Like many of its peers, the premise of *Bomb Jack* is simple. Dropped into a level besieged by bombs, the player must help Jack diffuse them. To make the mission more arduous the game throws in a number of intergalactic menaces. These range from mummies that patrol the platforms, metallic birds that will attack and whizzing UFOs that rocket around the screen acting as annoyingly as possible.

The beauty of the game is that the it can actually be played in two very different



» Jack hides outside the compounds of Tecmo HQ for safety.



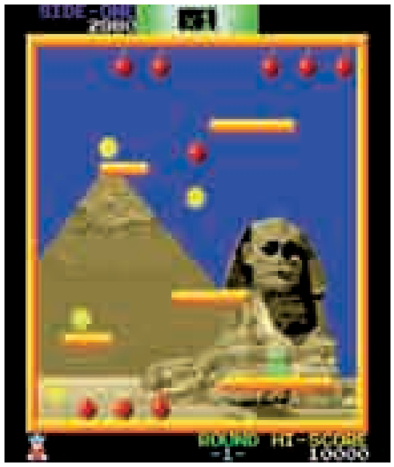
» The bombs seem to explode but they don't leave a mark on the little guy.

"YOU ALWAYS COME AWAY FROM ITS GAME-OVER SCREEN FEELING THAT WHAT YOU'VE JUST WITNESSED WAS SOLELY CAUSED BY YOUR INCOMPETENCE AS A GAMER"

ways. You can choose to quickly dart around the stages, haphazardly hoovering up the bombs, or you can seek them out in the order that they are activated – made apparent by a lit fuse. Opting to go for the bombs in the order they are triggered will gain you the biggest scores, but it also proves the most taxing method of play. While diffusing active bombs, they will often deliver the ignition spark to their neighbour, and the swarm of pursuing enemies can make your palms sweaty, reactions hesitant and often steer you into bombs you didn't want to disarm.

Ironically, despite its premise, the point of *Bomb Jack* is not to beat a ticking countdown or finish the stages in the quickest time. The bombs don't actually explode, they just like to imply that they might. So taking your time, drawing enemies into cleared areas and then quickly zipping to the other side of the screen often proves most successful.

To help Jack in his mission various tokens are dropped into play. These can award points, bestow extra lives – sometimes even a whole credit – and turn the tables on the enemies. Plagiarising *Pac-Man*'s power pill, one token will temporarily transform all of the enemies into cheery, yellow faces that Jack can safely collect, earning extra points.



» Um, that can't be good. Can it?

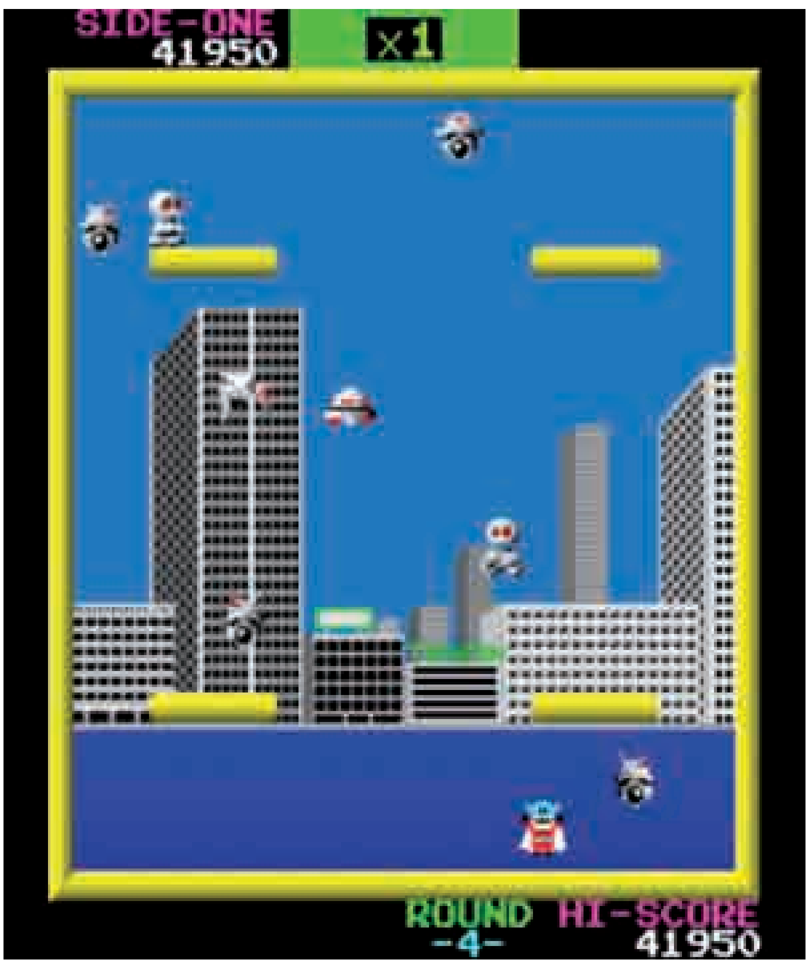


» Should have packed the sun cream for the trip to Germany.

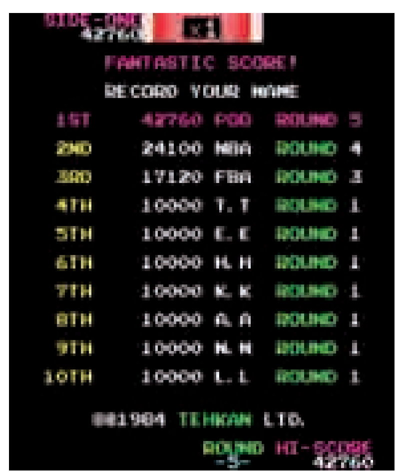
With a lot of collecting and, even more, avoiding to do within an extremely tight play area, Tecmo had to ensure that the control and collision detection in the game were tighter than a training bra on a sumo wrestler. The controls in the game are polarised around Jacks ability to fly. With height and trajectory influenced by joystick moves – holding up will allow Jack to soar to the top of the screen, while pressing down will reduce his altitude and prevent him overshooting the lower platforms. It's possible to fine-tune landings by tapping fire, allowing Jack to delicately float to the ground.

Finding you're constantly screaming at your avatar for costing you money is a good litmus test to expose a game's good or God-awful collision detection. In *Bomb Jack* you take death's bony finger on the chin and accept his decision with a sigh. You always come away from its game-over screen feeling that what you've just witnessed was solely caused by your incompetence as a gamer. The game's perception of collision is so spot-on that a desperate, evasive slam on the fire button, causing Jack's cloak to brush against the side of a UFO as he takes to the air, will often see the game not register the touch.

Called back into bomb disposal service on two other arcade adventures and a handful of home ports, Jack's superhero tenure was short-lived, but his exploits remain timeless. He now spends his days on his farm in Maine and, ironically, lives just across the road from Bomberman – although, they don't get on very well.



» "Ha, how do ya like that? Stage finished, smoked those robotic mummies, UFOs and birds."



» That most certainly is a fantastic score, although, the top score recorded is a colossal 20,101,960.

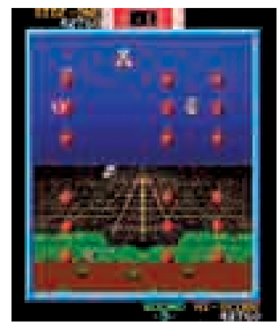
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RYGAR (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, C64, CPC, ZX SPECTRUM, NES, SMS, LYNX
YEAR: 1986

DEAD OR ALIVE
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, SATURN, PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1996

FATAL FRAME
SYSTEMS: PS2, XBOX
YEAR: 2001





» He got really miffed when the aliens invaded his making-out patch.

BOMB WHACK

Several home conversions of *Bomb Jack* were released courtesy of Elite. The Amiga and Atari ST versions managed to pretty much capture the graphical look of the game, but where every version fell down was in failing to re-create the superlative gameplay that Tecmo had instilled in the arcade game. Confusingly, every port of *Bomb Jack* has made the little fella look slightly different. The award for the most unattractive has to go to the poor C64 port. Transforming Jack into a chunky monkey and slowing the playability right down to the speed of erosion meant you could sometimes struggle to determine when the loading screen finished and the game began. Yes, we know that's a cruel thing to say. But, unfortunately, it's true. The ports just didn't live up to the arcade original.

COMPANY PROFILE

BULLFROG


GLENN CORPES AT THE EUROPEAN COMPUTER TRADE SHOW IN 2001 PRACTISING HIS JUGGLING SKILLS.

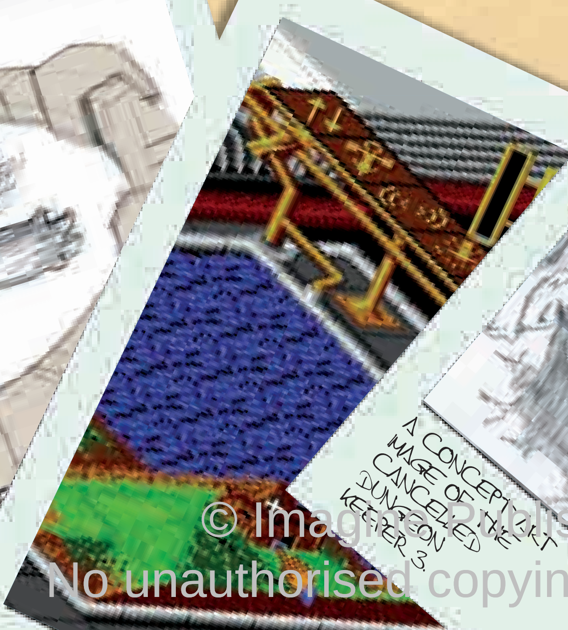
BEGINNINGS OF LIONHEAD. LEFT TO RIGHT: JONTY BARNES, TIM RANCE, DEMIS HASSABIS...


...PETER MOLYNEUX, STEVE JACKSON, MARK HEALEY, MARK WEBLEY.



DELVE INISDE ONE OF GAMING'S MOST FERTILE MINDS






A CONCEPT ART IMAGE OF THE CANCELLED DUNGEON KEEPER 3.





KINGS OF THE GOD GAME

Populous, Syndicate, Magic Carpet and Theme Park: all from Bullfrog and recognised around the globe. Former employees inform Kim Wild how a mistake by Commodore resulted in the creation of classic software for a multitude of formats

The sound studios of Bullfrog, where all the audio magic took place.



To look at a full history of Bullfrog, we need to go back to 1982 when Les Edgar first met Peter Molyneux. Les had just opened a computer retail outlet in Guildford, focusing on the sales of Tandy machines (later BBC, Apple and Olivetti), when Peter arrived looking for a computer that would use the database software he had been writing for his employers. It was a meeting that formed a long-standing friendship. "I guess we just hit it off from that point on – we were almost the same age and shared a lot of interests, one of which was to succeed in business," recalls Les. "We had very much the same sense of humour and the unfaltering belief that one day we would be successful." However, the retail side of the industry lacked challenge or excitement for Les (a qualified electronics engineer) so the two joined forces, opening their own software company, Taurus, responsible for creating bespoke databases for commercial clients. After some time, Commodore contacted the firm, mistaking it for another company named Torus and sent it several prototype Amiga machines. Within the world of databases, Les and Peter developed a relational programmable database called Acquisition. It would prove to be a colossal mistake. "It makes me shudder to think about it now – even the name was a disaster," says Les. "The Americans didn't associate the word 'acquisition' with data collection and thought we were selling some sort of company mergers software. Nevertheless, we managed to sign a distribution deal with a US company and sold them the first 1,000 units. Life was good, the bank was happy, we were drunk – at least until the first 200-page fax containing bugs and problems arrived on our desk. Turns out that in real life (as against our simplistic testing), real people tried to use the software with real data in commercial situations and it didn't work. So, after spending all of our money fixing bugs and issuing a 50-page amendment to the manual, we had to question our future as commercial software developers."

With the Amiga becoming increasingly used for game development, it occurred to Les that they could write games themselves. There was just one snag: they didn't know how. The opportunity arose from a friend who had just finished *Druid II* for the Atari ST and needed someone to convert the game to the Amiga. "We lied about our abilities and got the project," says Les. "Although we didn't make any money from this, we learnt how to move sprites on the screen and developed our own basic routines for animation. Turns out that games are just a big database – that was handy. While this was going on, Peter was desperately fixing the Acquisition bugs while we were sorting out *Druid II*. In 1985 I founded Bullfrog in preparation for the time when Acquisition was out of our hair and we could concentrate on games."

Around that time, Glenn Corpes was employed as an artist, although his role changed throughout his time at Bullfrog. "I was interviewed for a programming job and spoke to Peter for a few hours only to be told they had all the programmers they needed. Luckily, I could draw a bit so I managed to get a job as an artist," recalls Glenn. His first job involved porting *Druid II*. "I basically copied the graphics and maps from the C64 version and its editor. I also did a little design work on the collision system as, even though I'd been hired as an artist, I was the only

IN BRIEF

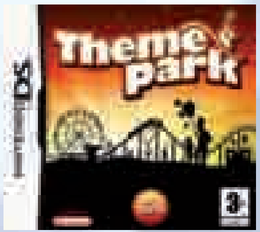
Bullfrog was first formed in 1985 by Peter Molyneux and Les Edgar. immediately springing to prominence thanks to highly inventive games like *Syndicate, Populous, Theme Park* and *Dungeon Master*, it was eventually purchased by publisher Electronic Arts in 1995. Molyneux eventually left, and founded Lionhead studios in 1997. Sadly, Bullfrog was disbanded in 2004 when EA combined it with its other UK studios to form EA UK.



» Les Edgar (here, with his new interest, cars) is still building things today.

THE LEGACY LIVES ON

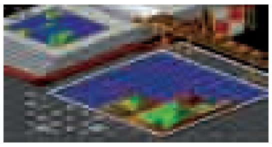
It seems that despite the passing of time and the amalgamation of the company into EA, Bullfrog's presence within the game industry can still be felt. A quick look at your local videogame emporium or supermarket, for that matter, will reveal copies of *Dungeon Keeper 2, Theme Hospital* and *Theme Park* (*Inc.* and *World*) in the budget section, still commanding healthy sales to a new generation of gamers. The ever-increasing emphasis on retro gaming has also played its hand, with the EA Replay PSP compilation featuring *Syndicate* among other non-Bullfrog titles and the Nintendo DS has recently seen a *Theme Park* remake adapted to the touch screen. *Theme Park DS* has had a mixed reception due to being a straight port of the PC original, but if you are still a fan of the original, this is a very good conversion for when you're on the move.



BULLFROG

CONVERSION CAPERS

Populous's popularity meant that conversions to other formats were inevitable. Les Edgar licensed out the rights to the PC, Mac, Sega and Nintendo, which led to *Populous* (and future Bullfrog titles) becoming an established franchise, with Japan proving surprisingly lucrative. Regarding the *Populous* conversion, Glenn Corpes comments, "These were handled by third-party developers and some worked better than others. The Mega Drive version was a simple port from the Amiga with a joypad-controlled mouse, very hard to play, while the SNES version (by Imagineer in Japan) was wonderful, had lots of shortcuts on different button combos. The Game Boy version was a particular favourite, based on a screen I knocked up on my Amiga of what *Populous* might look like, the wrong person walked past and it went into development. Unfortunately, it slowed to unplayable speeds as soon as more than ten people were walking around the map."



person with experience of that stuff in the company." Bullfrog also created *Fusion*, a futuristic shoot-'em-up game with some puzzles thrown in, which was ported by Glenn to the Atari ST. Its average quality, however, was soon forgotten with the advent of Bullfrog's next project: *Populous*.

Populous (originally called '*Creation*') was the game that put Bullfrog on the map, inventing a new genre, the 'God game'. Designed by Peter and Glenn in seven months, the title saw you playing a god, competing against another for territorial rights. At the time, *Populous* was original, being one of the first games to use an aerial perspective and having godlike powers to influence the followers. It was also one of the few titles to take advantage of a modem for network play. To begin with, very little interest was shown in the game by publishers, but it was Electronic Arts that took the gamble on a new concept. It proved to be a sound investment – the game sold over 4 million copies. "We knew it was an original concept but everyone who saw it 'got' it straight away. Obviously, we never knew how much of a hit it would be and in how many countries, but we knew it was pretty special," recalls Glenn.

"Once we achieved success with *Populous* life was truly great," says Les. "We were able to move from our old, dingy third-floor office into a shiny building on the Surrey Research Park. They had nice carpet and people that cleaned the windows without being asked. They hated us, though. Skateboarding down corridors, vomiting in the urinals, swimming in the ornamental pond, late night comings and goings. By this time we were about 20 people. This, to those that don't know yet or those that have already been there, is the perfect size. You know everybody, what they like on their pizza, what they drink, the names of their girlfriends and personal information that you can blackmail them with when it's their round."

Electronic Arts wanted a follow-up, so *Power Monger* was released to bridge a gap before the impending sequel. *Power Monger* was a success, around a million copies were sold, but it lacked the immediacy of *Populous*. Glenn never really took to the game, "It always seemed like *Populous* with less to do. The funny thing is that I've met loads of huge fans since, who regard it as an important proto-RTS." At the same time, *Flood* (developed by Sean Cooper with input from Peter), an underrated platformer starring Quiffy trying to save his world from being submerged under water, was released (see **Retro Gamer** 40).

Populous II was released in 1991, with more spells, enhanced AI and placing it in the world of Olympian Gods. Although refined, the concept never changed, meaning that *Populous II* remained a good game, rather than a classic. Personal preference or not, *Populous II* would sell over a million copies. It seemed that whatever the company touched, it transformed into a magic formula for success. This run of prosperity continued with the next project, *Syndicate*, Sean Cooper's creation. "My main contribution to *Syndicate* was achieving some pretty good contracts with publishers," says Les. "It was around this time that I renegotiated the terms of the original EA contract. We were in a strong position by now and we were able to improve our royalty rates and advances. I did spend a lot of time playing *Syndicate*, which still ranks as one of my favourites."

Its sequel, *Syndicate Wars* improved on the original, although, understandably, it didn't have the same appeal to those who worked on its predecessor. "The game was pretty good but it looked messy, the original had been hi-res even on old VGA cards in 386 machines. I also had more involvement with the original, having designed the graphics engine and several of the levels, so I'm not the most impartial person to ask," remarks Glenn.

Andy Robson joined the company full time after stints on *Syndicate* (3DO) and *Theme Park*. "My main role at Bullfrog was to oversee internal testing of all the games in development," he says. "It was also to help with feedback on the game mechanics, which was the best part. They would give us 50 levels to test and provide feedback for. We would rip the levels apart and give them pages and pages of constructive feedback. It was a pretty hectic place to be at times but I loved every minute of it." Testing console games is different to that of the computer incarnations. "Obviously you didn't have as much memory so everything always had to be squeezed down to fit," Andy explains. "Control methods had to be changed to compensate the console user. The one good thing about consoles was that you didn't have all the compatibility issues PCs had."

Magic Carpet was a technically impressive title that unfortunately was a commercial failure. Glenn explains a little of its conception, "I had been playing with the underlying 3D and texturing code for a couple of years, pausing only to design a few levels for *Syndicate* for light relief. The version that was released was finished in about nine months after ditching all but my graphics engine and landscape generation code." The sequel proved to be a source of contention for Bullfrog, it eventually shipped with some nasty bugs

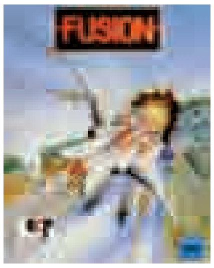
THE GAMES OF BULLFROG



DRUID II

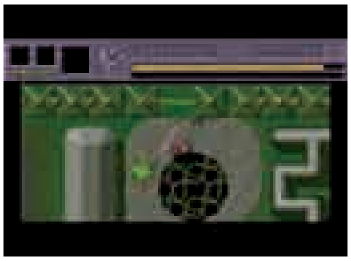
» The first game Bullfrog worked on, *Druid II* had gameplay similar in style to *Gauntlet*. As an exercise in learning how to program, *Druid II* served its purpose rather nicely.





FUSION

» *Fusion* didn't really enhance Bullfrog's reputation, but it did help to pave the way for its future success.





POPULOUS

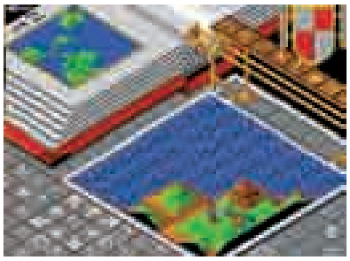
» As the game that made Bullfrog's name, *Populous* saw the creation of the 'God genre' and is still regarded as a classic, selling over 3 million copies since its release.

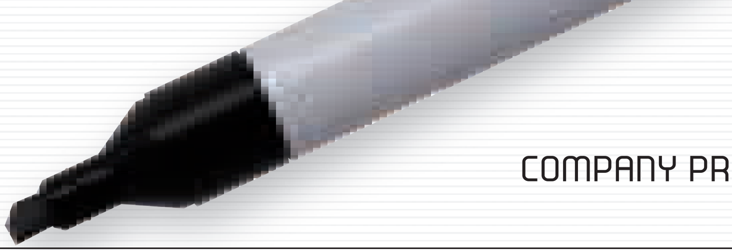




POPULOUS: THE PROMISED LANDS

» Five more worlds to add to the *Populous* canon, *Promised Lands* includes Wild West, Silly Land and Bit Plains, plus a map editor.





as a result of pressure from EA to get the game finished as quickly as possible.

Theme Park was the brainchild of Peter and Demi Habassis and was also the first game for Mark Healey. Having made something of an impact on his first day ("I remember smacking into one of the lead coders cars while trying to park. I was really worried, but the guy [Mike Diskette] was really cool about it."), Mark became the artist for the console versions. "For the SNES and Mega Drive, memory was much more limited than the PC version, but my C64 background made me an expert in using character-based graphics, so I managed to squeeze most things in. I really enjoyed doing those."

Despite a string of hits, Bullfrog was becoming uncertain about its future. Les explains, "We started talking to EA around 1993 about a possible 'merger'. I decided we should also talk to other major publishers (Sony, Virgin, BMG and so on) to make sure we got the best deal. EA were an easy choice as we had a good relationship with them already, knew most of the people and they offered us the best deal – not just in monetary terms, but great packages for the staff and a large degree of autonomy. In early 1995 we signed the merger document and moved into a new era of corporate confusion."

The first game to be released under the EA banner was *Hi-Octane* and was impressive given its short development time. "We were sitting at one of the quarterly management meetings when it transpired that one of EA's studios would not be able to release their game on time. In corporate land, this means lots of screaming, wailing and gnashing of teeth, so we (somewhat foolishly) stepped into the breach and said we could deliver a game in six weeks from concept to finish," remembers Les. Subsequent releases included the predominately overlooked *Gene Wars* and the quirky *Theme Hospital,* a creation that saw gamers having to manage a hospital burdened with comedic illnesses.

Dungeon Keeper went on to have the most troublesome development time, lasting three years due to a shock departure. "It was quite mad – about halfway through the project, Peter announced he was leaving Bullfrog (EA), but was obliged to finish the game. He was banned from coming into the office, so me, Simon and Dean Carter went and worked in Peter's house – I have fond memories of that time," recalls Mark. Andy had a memorable time with Peter, commenting, "He was good fun; we always played tricks on each other, things like, me killing his Tamogotchi in a cup of tea. It took me days to get it as he always had the thing round his neck on a string, but unfortunately for him, he left it unattended and you know the rest. He was a good motivator and could turn things around when a game looked like it wasn't going anywhere." The long wait was worth it, the press loved it despite the huge delay and it sold over a million copies. Many gamers remember the title for the horned reaper character and its tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. "One thing I can say is that running a dungeon was scarily similar to the way Bullfrog worked," comments Mark. "Once I was involved, thinking of stuff around that theme was easy, the main horned reaper character (or 'horny' as I liked to call him) was my design. He is based on an ex-girlfriend of mine, she had a very similar grin. And a similar temperament." *Dungeon Keeper 2* was the first game to be developed after Peter's departure and its commercial success matched the scolding reviews it received.

Although subsequent *Populous* and *Theme Park* games were released, many of the original team felt ill at ease with EA. "By the time EA bought Bullfrog, the company had grown too big for my liking. It tends to make people feel like small cogs, and you get lots of people who are good at talking, but really quite talentless. Strange managers started appearing and suddenly what the shareholders think is more important than anything else. I hated it," says Mark. Andy has the same view, "It just became very corporate. Having to attend more meetings, write more reports and the old 'bullfroggers' didn't really want to work on EA titles. It became a job in the end and not the cool, innovative Bullfrog it was in the early days." Peter's departure also had a big affect on those left behind. "I felt the heart of the place was missing – Bullfrog was no longer a creative haven for me, it felt more like a chicken factory," says Mark.

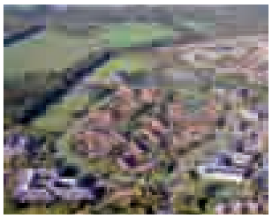
Concept work, by different developers, began on *Dungeon Keeper 3* in 1999, but EA was more concerned with the movie licences so the project was shelved. In 2001, the remains of Bullfrog were absorbed into EA and ceased to exist, ending a legacy spanning 15 years.

These days, Mark is working on *LittleBigPlanet*, Glenn has set up Weirdwood, a company distributing electronic titles, and Andy has his own testing outsource company, Testology. Les is no longer in the industry, having worked on racing cars, "I was instrumental in getting Aston Martin back into racing", and is doing what he loves most: building things. "*Populous* got me into being a megalomaniac and I haven't stopped since."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

After a managerial role at Electronic Arts, Peter Molyneux longed to get back to making games so handed in his resignation in 1996. In 1997, he founded Lionhead Studios (named after Mark Webley's dead pet hamster) which would develop its first title: *Black & White*. The game was in development for over four years, but its release in 2001 accumulated rave reviews and won numerous awards. *Fable* followed in 2004 on Xbox, notching up 2 million sales, although at the time it was criticised for not including all the features promised during development. Expansion pack *Fable: The Lost Chapters* was released on Xbox and PC in 2005. *Black & White 2* and *The Movies* were released, but didn't sell as well as projected, so in 2006, the studio was bought by Microsoft. Peter Molyneux is currently working on *Fable 2* and a secret project.





» Surrey Research Park, Bullfrog's home ground. Interestingly, Lionhead is now based within the same centre.



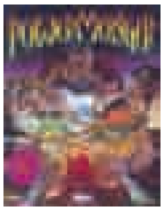
POPULOUS: THE FINAL FRONTIER

» Another add-on disc, offering 500 levels based on another planet. It was released just for the Amiga magazine *The One* and featured on its cover disc.



FLOOD

» *Flood* demonstrated that other genres were possible. It was an enjoyable platform game featuring a bizarre creature named Quiffy trying not to get flooded. A plot twist annoyed many gamers.



POWER MONGER

» Aimed at being a real-time strategy war game, a rushed development meant that *Power Monger* never became the classic game it could have been, nevertheless it still has quite a substantial fan following.



POPULOUS II: TRIALS OF THE OLYMPIAN GODS

» Set among the world of Olympian Gods, *Populous II* refined the original's concept and included additional brand new spells. Doesn't quite have the same appeal as *Populous*, though.





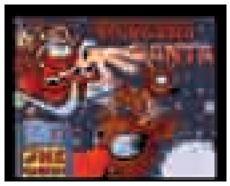






POWER MONGER: WORLD WAR ONE DATA DISC

» This *Power Monger* data disc essentially took the original *Power Monger* game and set it against the backdrop of the First World War, while also adding a number of extra campaigns.



PSYCHO SANTA

» This quirky little gem appeared solely on *The One* Amiga cover disc, featuring you in the role of a very unbalanced Santa in a shoot-'em-up come platform escapade.



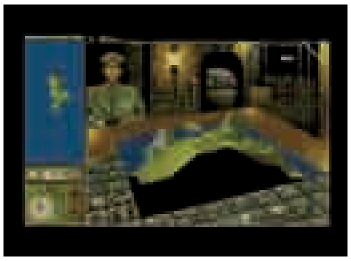
SYNDICATE

» Hailed as one of Bullfrog's best endeavours, *Syndicate* was dark and violent in a cyberpunk world. With guns, drugs and technology, *Syndicate* took the world by storm and never looked back.



SYNDICATE: AMERICAN REVOLT

» A *Syndicate* expansion pack, the 25 new missions included are incredibly tough, offering those who finished the original even more of a challenge to get into. You have been warned.











POPULOUS II: THE CHALLENGE GAME

» Modes: Create Your Own Deity, Challenge and Conquest. You can carry out tasks like saving a certain amount of the population within an enforced time limit.



MAGIC CARPET

» *Magic Carpet* saw an apprentice wizard riding a carpet to destroy the enemies. Competition from *Doom* prevented the game from being a success, however.



THEME PARK

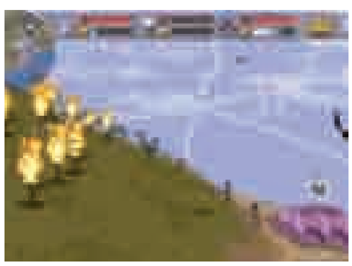
» *Theme Park* was an excellent management game that still holds up today. It may have been surpassed by the likes of *Rollercoaster Tycoon*, but its appeal remains strong for many gamers.



TUBE

» A tech demo by Glenn Corpes, this was released onto a magazine cover disc but never made it to a full product. It can be downloaded from Home of the Underdogs.











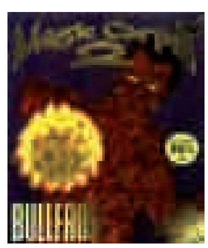
HI-OCTANE

» An unusual diversion from the usual simulation diet, *Hi-Octane* was a futuristic racer that added little to the genre and has aged badly. Not bad for six weeks work, though.



MAGIC CARPET: HIDDEN WORLDS

» A *Magic Carpet* expansion pack offering a winter-themed tileset and 25 new levels offering more of the same.



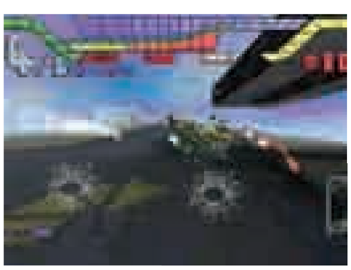
MAGIC CARPET 2

» The much-maligned sequel, *Magic Carpet 2* included varied levels and an improved storyline, but failed to attain the appeal of the original.



SYNDICATE WARS

» *Syndicate Wars* added an even deeper storyline. It is noticeably excellent, although many still prefer the ground-breaking original.











GENE WARS

» An overlooked fantasy-strategy game that featured you assembling races of different species. Its confusing interface made it hard to get into and it has been widely ignored since.



THEME HOSPITAL

» With fictional diseases like Slack Tongue, it's impossible not to love the manic nature of the excellent *Theme Hospital*. Unmissable.



DUNGEON KEEPER

» Renowned for its wicked (literally) sense of humour and the horned reaper, *Dungeon Keeper* saw you managing a dungeon with torture devices, hellish minions and imps.



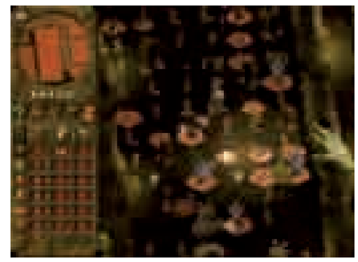
DUNGEON KEEPER: THE DEEPER DUNGEONS

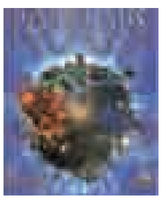
» An add-on with 30 more levels and improved AI. In 1998, *Dungeon Keeper Gold* combined this with the original, adding a theme pack and level editor.











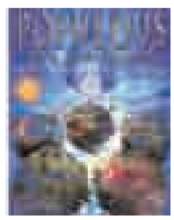
POPULOUS 3: THE BEGINNING

» Developed by a new team (Glenn Corpes was responsible for designing the landscape texture generator) gameplay elements were added including chopping trees to build huts.



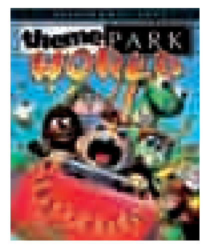
DUNGEON KEEPER 2

» The second game in the series used a brand new engine and managed to improve on the concept of the original, despite not being developed by the original development team.



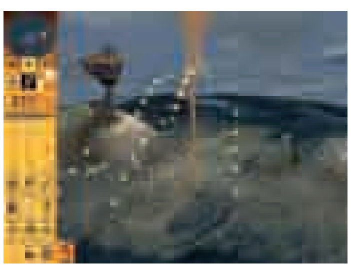
POPULOUS 3: UNDISCOVERED WORLDS

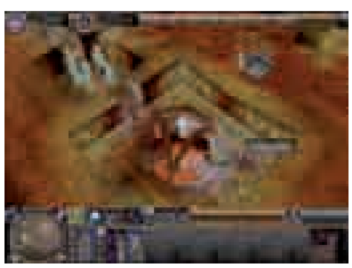
» Yet another one of those data discs that Bullfrog is so fond of, it was released in the UK with a further 12 levels to conquer, both in single and multiplayer modes.

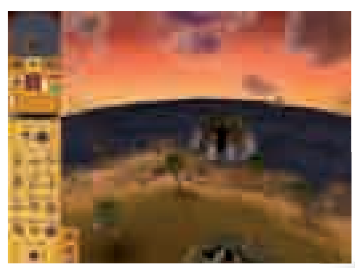


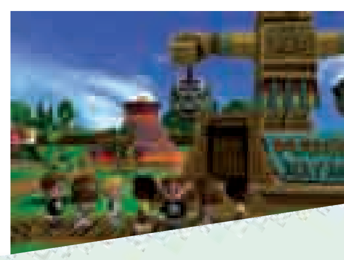
THEME PARK WORLD

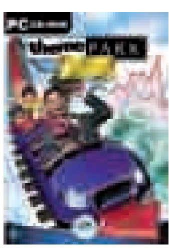
» A 3D update of the first game, *Theme Park World* was a reasonable title aimed at the console market. Sadly, it failed to live up to the original version.











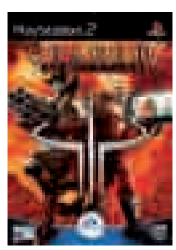
THEME PARK INC.

» Aimed at the younger market, *Theme Park Inc.* followed the template of the original, but had little involvement with the old Bullfrog crowd. Competent, but dull.



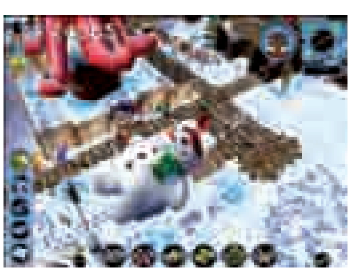
THEME AQUARIUM/ AQUARIUM

» Credited as being developed by Bullfrog, but it originated in Japan. Released here on the PC as *Aquarium*, it's a hideous water park title better left alone.

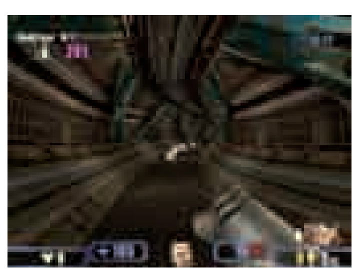


QUAKE III: REVOLUTION

» The last game tagged with the Bullfrog name despite the distinct lack of 'Bullfroggers', *Quake III* was a port of the PC game onto the PS2 to critical acclaim.



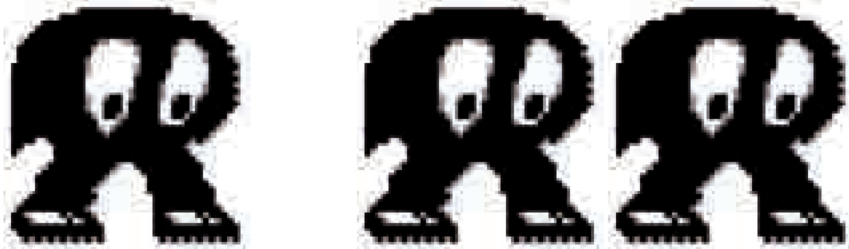




Peter Molyneux was instrumental to the success of Bullfrog in its early days. He is now at Lionhead.

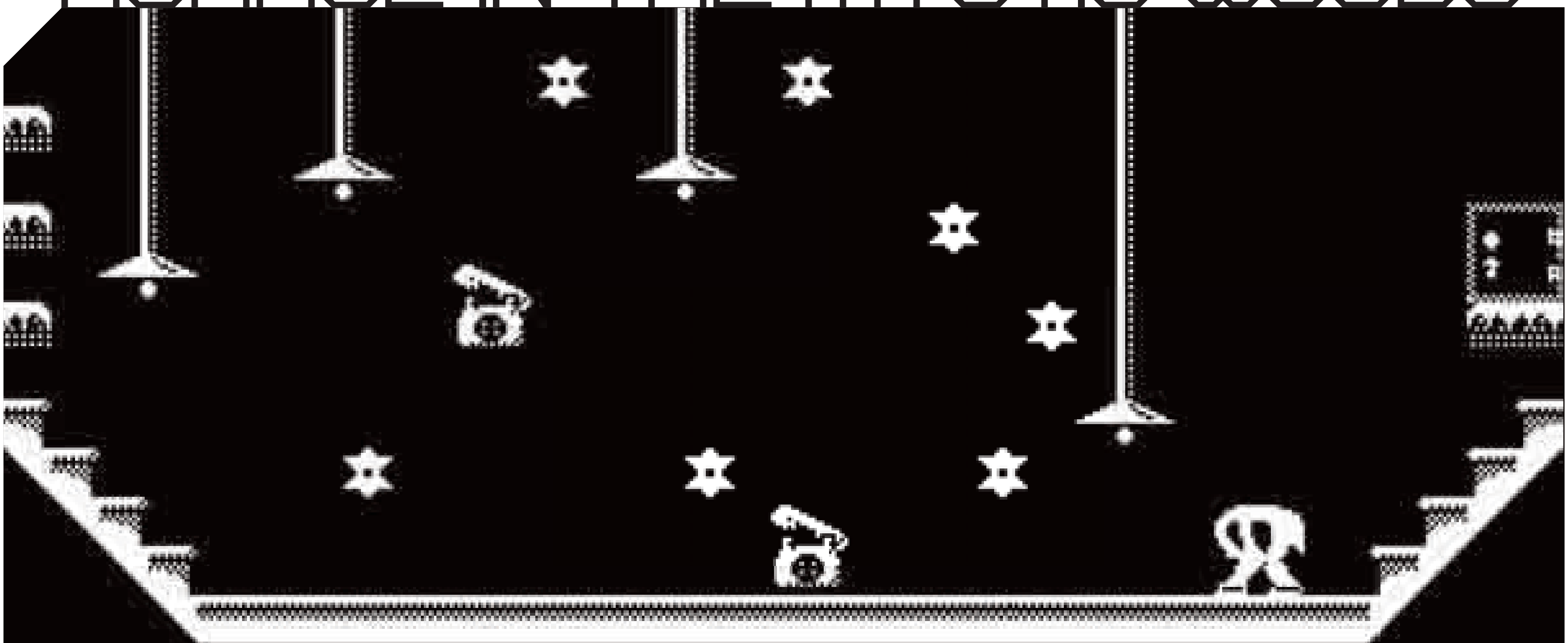


THANKS TO Cathy Campos for several interviews
CREDIT TO Lemon Amiga and HOL for some images



Whatever happened to...

HORACE IN THE MYSTIC WOODS



YOU'D BE WRONG IF YOU THOUGHT BEAM SOFTWARE RETIRED HORACE AFTER HIS SPIDERY ESCAPADE IN 1983, BUT IT'S AN EASY MISTAKE TO MAKE. MARTYN CARROLL FINDS OUT WHAT THE LITTLE BLUE GUY DID NEXT



» The compilation features six games, including *Horace* and Michael's bouncing-ball game *Stigma*. They were perfect for when you weren't doing boring business stuff on your Psion.

NEED TO KNOW

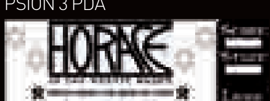
SYSTEM:
PSION SERIES 3

DEVELOPER:
MICHAEL WARE

START OF DEVELOPMENT:
1995

DATE OF CANCELLATION:
NA

VERSION PLAYED BY RG:
PSION 3 PDA



» With 64 tricky levels to overcome, the game was certainly more challenging and engaging than the original Spectrum titles.

For a blobby thing with bug eyes and crazy legs, Horace certainly lived a full and happy life. When he wasn't running around a maze munching fruit, he was hitting the slopes or stomping on oversized arachnids. But you probably knew all this already, as the *Horace* games were very popular in the early-Eighties, particularly on the Spectrum where the character became an unlikely mascot. You might know that a fourth game, entitled *Horace To The Rescue*, was due to be released in 1985. It received a brief mention in *Sinclair Programs* magazine. There were no screenshots or gameplay details, however, just a little plot information. Apparently, Horace now had a girlfriend, and we can guess from the title that the game involved saving Horace's sweetheart from some hackneyed situation or other. And guess is all we can do because the game was never published. According to *Crash* magazine, it was shelved after William Tang, creator of the original *Horace* trilogy, suffered a collapsed lung during its development. It's rumoured that *Horace* would be making the jump to 3D, and some kind of puzzle-solving element would be included, but for now the mystery of *Horace To The Rescue* remains.

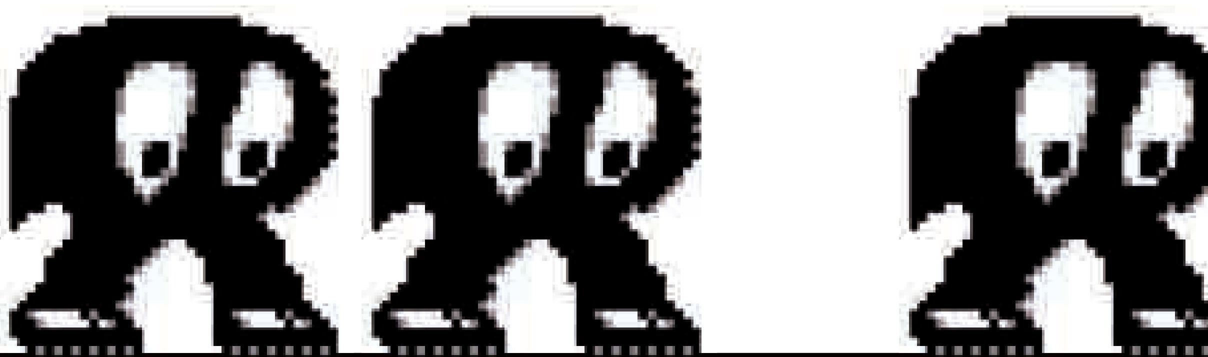
That's not the end of the story though. A fourth *Horace* game *was* released, yet there's hardly any reference to it online or in print. Most sources refer only to the '*Horace* trilogy.' They've only gone and overlooked *Horace In The Mystic Woods*…



» The game features lots of nods to *Manic Miner*, including melting platforms and even molestation by mutant telephones.

WITHIN THE WOODS

"No one realises there was another *Horace* game that was fully licensed by Psion and Beam Software," says Michael Ware, programmer of *Horace In The Mystic Woods*. The reason it probably passed most people by is that it appeared in 1995, 12 years after *Horace And The Spiders*, and it was released exclusively for the Psion 3 PDA. The greatest irony is that it's not even difficult to find – it regularly appears on eBay and can be picked up for one or two pounds. It comes on a compilation called *Games Deluxe* along with







» Various pick-ups are scattered around the levels, such as clocks that slow down time, allowing Horace to nip past fast-moving enemies.

"A FOURTH HORACE GAME WAS RELEASED, YET THERE'S HARDLY ANY REFERENCE TO IT ONLINE OR IN PRINT. MOST SOURCES REFER ONLY TO THE 'HORACE TRILOGY.' THEY'VE ONLY GONE AND OVERLOOKED HORACE IN THE MYSTIC WOODS…"

five other titles. *Horace* is the star, however. The game box even features a splash which shouts "Horace is back!", just in case you didn't know that he was hiding inside.

Before getting to grips with the Psion, Michael was a Commodore 64 coder responsible for a couple of budget shooters – *Warhawk* for Firebird and *Tanium* for Players. "I then got married and had kids, so I didn't have the time to code any more," he tells us. "Later in 1994 I purchased a Psion PDA. I liked the language it used and went to work coding some games, the first being a *Tetris* clone. When I got the hang of it I coded a game called *Stigma*. It involved a ball that you had to navigate around a hundred screens featuring magnets, doors, one-way exits and breaking walls – that sort of thing. I released it as shareware and things went mad," Michael recalls. "Everyone wanted it. I got a call from Psion asking me to withdraw it from shareware as it wanted to publish the game. I was thrilled. Then Psion wanted another game that had to be ready in just two weeks. I said I would do it and was told that it would be a *Horace* game. There were smiles all round – I was a big fan of the earlier Spectrum games and was overjoyed to be working on another one."

The original trilogy borrowed liberally from popular arcade games such as *Pac-Man* and *Frogger*. For the new game Michael asked the publisher if it had any particular kind of game in mind. "Psion had no idea," he says. "So it sent me the list of games that were going to be on the compilation. I noticed that it was lacking a platform game, so I put that forward and Psion liked the idea."

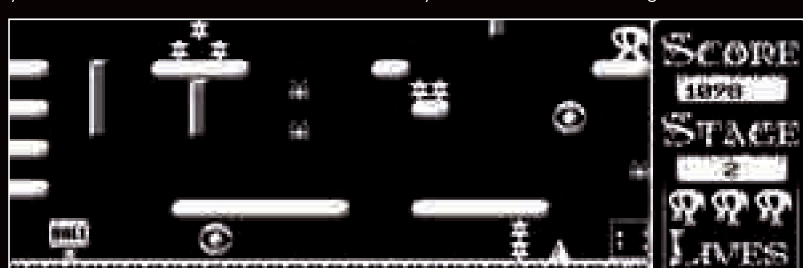
Over the next fortnight Michael frantically put together *Horace In The Mystic Woods*. "It really was a struggle to get the work done in such a tight timescale. The actual coding was not the time consuming part – the same sort of coding tricks I used on the C64 were a benefit on the Psion. It was the sound, graphics and level design that took the time. I got it all done with three days to spare and I submitted the game with 30 levels. Joe Odukoya from Psion rang and said he was thrilled with the game. So thrilled, in fact, that he wanted more levels. I spent the last three days taking the level count up to 64, a homage to my Commodore days."

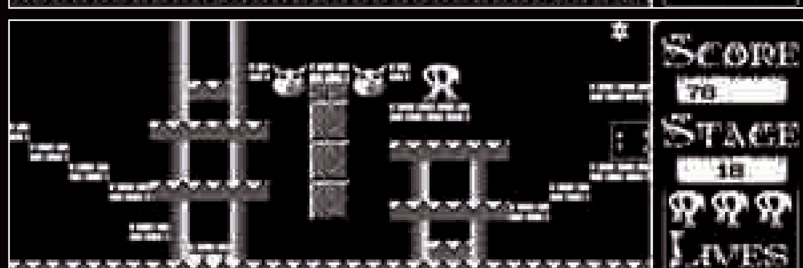
HORACE HEADS HOME

There was no doubt that the development was rushed, but the result was a surprisingly slick platformer that played like a hyperactive version of *Manic Miner*. In each static screen you had to avoid the various enemies and collect all of the objects so that you could move onto the next level. The overall aim of the game was to guide Horace out of the woods and back home to safety. It was a tough challenge but certainly not a tedious one, and it's difficult to imagine how a significantly better *Horace* game could have been made for the Spectrum. Perhaps *Horace To The Rescue* was not such a great loss after all.

"I was pleased with the finished game," says Michael. "Though, had I had more time I would have put in a few more homages to the original Spectrum games and added more levels to round it up to a hundred. Arcade games never seemed to fare too well on the Psion, although it ran pretty smoothly compared to other games on the system. Ultimately, it's a generic platform game. It may not be a long lost classic, but it's still the last link in a piece of gaming history."

If you're hungry for more *Horace* then you'll need to grab hold of a Psion Series 3 PDA and the game SSD (Solid State Disk). There is a Psion emulator available for older versions of Windows, but our shrewdest web-searching skills were unable to locate a copy of the game for download. So, in this case, eBay is your friend rather than Google.

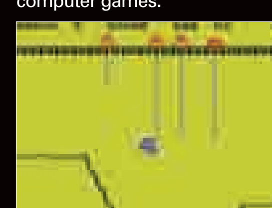




» Silly Horace, getting hopelessly lost in the dense woods. Perhaps he should stick to skiing in the future.

TANGLED WEB

Another *Horace* mystery was recently solved, regarding the non-appearance of *Horace And The Spiders* on the C64. The first two *Horace* games were ported to the Commodore 64 by Gregg Barnett, who would later go on to create classics like *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*. When recently asked what became of the third *Horace* game, Gregg told Frank Gasking of Games That Weren't (http://gtw64.retro-net.de) that *Spiders* was not even considered as a C64 port. "Things had moved on by then," he revealed. "We'd done *Fist* and ported *The Hobbit* – both mega sellers compared to the *Horace* games. It was clear that bigger things could be done on the 64. Hence, *Horace* was fondly retired. It was a series that belonged in the early days of home-computer games."



THE SIMPSONS

A FAITHFUL RE-CREATION OF THE ANIMATED SHOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **GENRE:** SIDE-SCROLLING BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50 PCB BOARD



HISTORY

The Simpsons **doesn't really have the finest track record when it comes to classic videogames.** *Virtual Bart*, *Bart Vs. The Space Mutants* and *Bart's Nightmare*, all pretty much formed the stuff of real nightmares. But when Konami got hold of the licence, it took it by the horns, gave it a well-needed slap to its yellow chops and crafted one of the finest, and most humorous arcade games of the Nineties. And thank God that it had the brains not to include the word 'Bart' in the title.

The Simpsons took everything that was great about the show and crammed it into an interactive cartoon. The glorious, vivid look of the show was perfectly re-created, as was the humour and its trademark charisma. Lisa, Marge, Homer and Bart were all there, voiced by the original actors, and ready to be led into the chaotic action, which involved chasing down Smithers, thwarting Mr Burns and rescuing poor little Maggie.

Thankfully, Konami based the game's levels on the recognisable locales of Springfield and had many of the series' wildly charismatic populace turn up throughout the game. They also introduced new characters to the mix, such as the generic-looking goons and those guys that looked like Gunther from *Friends*. However, they all played cannon fodder to Marge's vacuum cleaner, Bart's skateboard, Lisa's jump rope and Homer's puffy fist.

Released after the second series had finished airing in the US, *The Simpsons* was a strange take on the side-scrolling brawlers of the day. Based on the engine of Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* cab, it introduced a unique fighting system, allowing players to team up, fight in tandem and pick up heavy objects. The game didn't shirk on the show's love of the pastiche, either – it was littered with episodic-nods for *Simpsons* fans to pant-wet over.

All of the game's peculiar and colourful end-bosses proved annoyingly credit-hungry, but non more so than frail, old Mr Burns; who, with the aid of a mech-suit, would probably cause even Ned Flanders to swear like a trooper and put his fist through the cab's screen.




INSERT COIN
SPRINGFIELD FIRE DEPT

THE MAKING OF...

COLIN MCRAE RALLY

On its release in 1998, Colin McRae Rally heralded a new age of realistic racing simulations. For the first time, gamers could put pedal to the metal in an authentic rallying experience with life-like physics, real-time car damage and varied stage-based courses from around the globe. Retro Gamer talks to Gavin Raeburn, Brian Coller and Jamie Adamson from Codemasters' McRae development team about their work on the pioneering rally-sport simulation





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1998
» **GENRE:** DRIVING SIMULATION
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



Rallying is an ideal sport to feature in a videogame. Substituting the corporate gloss and over-powered engine capacities of Formula One with the raw, visceral excitement of tearing through unpaved roads in a souped-up street car, it appeals to the boy racer in us all. So it may come as a surprise, in this day and age, when rally-sport sims are ten a penny, that there wasn't really any notable gaming experience to replicate the thrill of the gravel power slide until *Sega Rally Championship* hit arcades in 1995. *Sega Rally* was the first racing game to make the distinction between the 'feel' of driving on various road surfaces, such as mud, gravel and asphalt, and admirably demonstrated to gamers the inherent fun of simulated off-road driving. During the 32-bit-console era PlayStation owners eyed the Saturn-exclusive conversion of Sega's landmark rally-sim enviously, and it wasn't until the release of Infogrames' *V-Rally* in 1997 that the sport was properly represented on their machine. However, Infogrames' title, although generally well-received, took an arcade-like and unrealistic competitive off-road racing approach. It also featured notoriously 'featherweight' fantasy-physics, where cars would flip and spin like empty cardboard boxes at the slightest mishandled bump or mis-taken bend. Fortunately, for more discerning fans of the sport, a new contender for rally-sim champion was just around the corner, one that would provide a far more genuine experience, with just the player, on an open road racing against nothing but the clock.

Back in late 1996 over at Codemasters Warwickshire HQ, a young team including Brian Coller, Jamie Adamson and Gavin Raeburn, were coming to the close of development on their first motorsport title. Having gained the official licence for the *TOCA British Touring Car Championship,* the Darling brothers were intending to grab a slice of the lucrative racing-sim market, which was as yet untapped by their company. On its release *TOCA Touring Cars* was acclaimed by gamers and press alike for its realism and advanced real-time damage modelling. With *TOCA* out of the bag, the team turned its attention to the second of the Codemasters 'driving licences', a rally game endorsed and even developed with the co-operation of the 'Flying Scotsman' of rally driving, the recently deceased Colin McRae.

"*Colin McRae* and *TOCA* were two of the strongest licences available to us at the time," says Gavin, justifiably proud of the distinguished pedigree of both titles and the association with the world-famous rally champion. "We felt that the *McRae* licence would add authenticity to our series and elevate the game above the many derivative, unlicensed racers on the market." Jamie adds, "*Sega Rally* was a hit in the arcades at the time and, therefore, did have some influence on



» The superb real-time damage modelling demonstrated with the help of a tree.



» This is probably something best avoided.

the decision to make a rally game, but a more important influence was Colin's 1995 World Championship win. Having a British driver become champion, and Colin being such an exciting driver meant that it was perfect to base a videogame on."

Apart from *Sega Rally*, **Retro Gamer** wondered if the Codemasters team had played any other rally sims in preparation for the development of *Colin McRae*. Jamie replies: "In terms of other rally games influencing the way *Colin McRae* was made, the development team obviously played existing rally games of the time, but it was more a case of watching real rally footage and trying to capture the fast pace and excitement the sport is famous for in the game." However, one title that definitely wasn't an influence was Sony's epic *Gran Turismo* (released just before *Colin McRae* and still the biggest-selling game on Sony's flagship console), which the team only became aware of midway through the game's production. The project team started with code taken from the previous *TOCA* game, but this soon proved unworkable and was abandoned. A new game engine needed to be developed specifically for *Colin McRae*. Fortunately, this enabled the team to address the subtleties of off-road driving in a much more applied manner than simply altering its previous *TOCA* engine that had been primarily designed to simulate circuit racing on asphalt.

The driving-physics of the *Colin McRae* franchise are deservedly well renowned, and were unparalleled at the time of the original game's release. "The car physics system used *TOCA* as its foundation, which was then built upon to provide all the functionality required for simulating rally cars," says Brian. "One part of the handling system that has always played a major role in the *Colin McRae* series is the effects of the many, different ground surfaces that are used throughout the game. The difference between driving on smooth asphalt, the loose 'pea gravel' of Australia and the snow of Sweden has always been important to us as it's one of the unique aspects of rallying." Of course, having a World Rally Champion advising and offering feedback to the team during its development didn't hurt either." Colin definitely contributed to the game on the car-handling side, playtesting and offering advice until the cars felt right. Nicky Grist was always helpful, too, when it came to the tracks and co-driver calls," reveals Jamie.

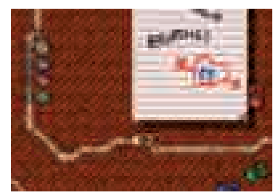
Most racing games of the era, including *Gran Turismo*, were notorious for featuring 'indestructible' licensed vehicles that wouldn't even suffer a scratch to their paint work, even after a 140mph collision with a brick wall. *Colin McRae* was one of the first motorsport simulations to feature realistic damage modelling, following in the footsteps of the pioneering *TOCA*. This 'warts and all' approach could easily have complicated the licensing of the game's featured vehicles from their respective manufacturers, but luckily, all of the

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MICRO MACHINES (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SEGA MEGA DRIVE, SNES
YEAR: 1993/1994

TOCA TOURING CARS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1997

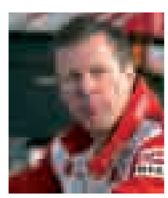
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 2000



» This driver's 'head-cam' view was added for the Platinum re-release.



RALLY HEROES



COLIN MCRAE
Following in the footsteps of his father (five-time British Rally champion Jimmy McRae), Colin entered the rally arena at the wheel of a Talbot Sunbeam in 1985, and was soon displaying his remarkable flair for the sport, winning the Scottish Rally Championship in 1988, and the British Championship with Subaru in 1991 and again in 1992 when he won every round. His first WRC stage win came in New Zealand the next year. Driving his famous Impreza, in 1995 he became the first ever British WRC Champion, as well as providing the Subaru team a string of manufacturer's victories. After success in the 2002 Kenyan Safari Rally (the world's toughest WRC event), Colin became the first driver to accumulate 25 World Rally wins. On 15 September 2007, Colin and his son, Johnny, were tragically killed in a helicopter crash within the grounds of the McRae family home in Lanarkshire. Colin will be remembered as a world-class rally hero and will be sadly missed.

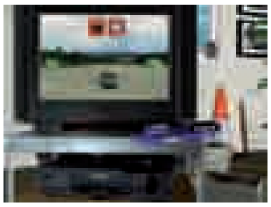


NICKY GRIST
Welshman Nicky was Colin's co-driver from 1997 until the Scot's final rally in 2002, a highly successful period in which Colin competed for both Subaru and Ford in the World Rally Championship, during which the two-man team achieved a total of 17 World Rally Championship wins together. Nicky provides all the verbal co-driver instructions featured throughout *Colin McRae Rally*.

THE MAKING OF... COLIN MCRAE RALLY

BACK TO SCHOOL

Colin McRae's Rally School mode was an excellent feature designed to further improve would-be armchair-rally-champions' driving skills in a non-race environment under the supervision of Colin himself. Unlike *Gran Turismo*'s mandatory License mode it could be dipped into at leisure by players. Lessons ranged from simple tasks, such as weaving a course through traffic cones, to simulated rally stages under various conditions, and were all preceded by an educational 'video' detailing recommended driving techniques, cornering lines and braking points. After each exercise the player was awarded a 'pass' or 'fail' rating depending on marks received relating to factors such as speed, driving position and ability to listen to instructions. They could also gain a mark for 'car sympathy' depending on how well they had kept their vehicle in one piece. Great stuff.



NIGHT RIDERS

Colin McRae Rally was notable for including a number of night stages, although these were subsequently dropped from the sequel due to authenticity issues. Jamie explains, "At the time, night-time courses were used both for aesthetic and technical reasons. Having night-time stages disguised the fact that the draw distance was severely limited on the PlayStation, often to only 100-200m. In later versions, track draw distances improved and so there was less need to disguise the technical limitations. In parallel with real-world rallying, night stages were being used less frequently, only being regularly seen in Monte Carlo, the UK and for pre-rally Super Special stages. This was most reflected in *Colin McRae 3* where our Super Special stages were all run at night."



companies involved were keen to play ball. "Before *Colin McRae Rally*, not many racing titles had really tackled car damage to the extent that was needed to portray rallying at its best," says Jamie. "So when it came to licensing the cars for *Colin McRae*, the manufacturers were told upfront that our intention was to re-create the types of crashes that rallying is famous for, so it became more a case of how much they wanted their car to feature in the game." Fortunately, the manufacturers were happy for their cars to feature heavily in the game, even in a destructible state.

Another notable feature of the original *Colin McRae* was the realistic and very atmospheric track-modelling, and the global scope of the stages featured in the game. For the creation of these courses, a dedicated track-design application was developed in-house. Although limited in comparison with design tools available to development teams today, this application was subsequently built upon and used on all games in the franchise until *Colin McRae 2005*. "Before creating a new rally stage we would always sit and watch hours of video footage and look through hundreds of images to really get a feel for the key features and ambience of each country featured in the game," says Brian. "Not only did our research enable us to get the visuals right, it also showed us what types of corners and road features were fun to drive in real rallying, which we then transferred to the game." The track tool supported a single continuous length of track, worked in 2D only from a top-down viewpoint, and could only represent the various textures applied on the track as solid colours. "Even with all the limitations of the track tool it had many strengths, which even current 3D modelling applications lack when it comes to designing levels for racing titles. The level-design team could quickly and easily adjust the shape and flow of the road to get the playability factor spot on."

Jamie is happy to elaborate on the varied array of worldwide locations featured in *Colin McRae*. "The intention was to create a game that contained familiar rally locations, but also some dramatic locations that we felt would be cool to include, such as Indonesia. All of the tracks are fictional, but research was done in the real-world locations, with designers picking classic styles of roads or corners and adding in recognisable scenes to create a believable and exciting series of tracks." Jamie continues, "The limitations of the platform at the time meant that achieving the full scope of some of the countries was difficult, especially Corsica, but there were many times when features were created and tweaked until the desired effect had been achieved."

The game was completed after a development period of around 18 months and the team relate that it was pleased with the results of its labours, having successfully integrated nearly every feature it had set out to do so in the game. "Pretty much everything we wanted to do with the game was kept in, with the exception of some code for flocking birds!" says Jamie proudly. "Circuit racing was down as a possible inclusion for the first game, but was kept back until *Colin McRae 2.0* because it was felt at the time that it didn't suit the overall feel of the first game, which was very authentic rallying, especially with the inclusion of the Rally School training mode." So looking back, does he wish the team had done anything differently for the original *Colin McRae*? "No game is perfect but we got most things we wanted into the finished

> "IT WAS MORE A CASE OF WATCHING REAL RALLY FOOTAGE AND TRYING TO CAPTURE THE FAST PACE AND EXCITEMENT THE SPORT IS FAMOUS FOR IN THE GAME" JAMIE ADAMSON



» Who put that caterpillar there?

» Wet stages were notable for the amount of mud you could plaster your vehicle with.



product. Anything that the team has subsequently wanted to do or change about the game has been done with each sequel, such as new countries and vehicles, new track-building techniques, improved handling and better graphical effects. Even with *DiRT* there are things that we are already thinking about how to improve the next time around."

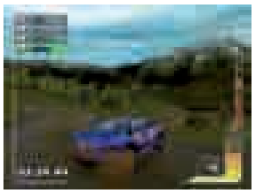
Deservedly the game was a massive hit for Codemasters. It shifted well over a million units in Europe alone, and it would later be re-released on Sony's Platinum range of best-selling titles. Thanks to the title's extremely positive critical and consumer reception, and also the preceding *TOCA game*, Codemasters was awarded the title of Publisher Of The Year by *Edge* magazine during 1998. The game's success spawned an arguably even more impressive sequel, *Colin McRae Rally 2.0*, which was released two years later. "The sequel built on the success of *Colin McRae* by enhancing every area of the game," says Jamie. "From the menus onward it was clear that it was a slicker, more polished title, and once you got into a race it was obvious in the improved car handling and graphics that a lot of time and effort was spent on making the game a worthy successor to an already good game."

On being asked his final thoughts on why the *Colin McRae* franchise has proved so popular with gamers over the last nine years, Jamie offers this summation. "I think the uniqueness of the *Colin McRae* experience is what has kept the series at the top of the rally pile for so long. There have been a lot of other rally games released during the same time period, but each has done things very differently to our games, even when they've tried to emulate them. *Colin McRae* is a perfect mix of arcade and simulation handling that makes the titles easy to play but hard to master. Some rally games were too arcade-like and therefore too easy and short-lived, while others were too simulation heavy and very frustrating for most players." Jamie thinks for a second, then concludes, "*Colin McRae* has always pulled the player into the game early on, made them feel that maybe they can be a top rally driver, and then made them want to succeed at it. Because it's fun." A sentiment echoed in the life and career of Colin McRae, a rally driver whose legend will live on in memory and perhaps even through his games.

"THE UNIQUENESS OF THE MCRAE EXPERIENCE IS WHAT'S KEPT THE SERIES AT THE TOP FOR SO LONG"

GLOBAL DRIVE

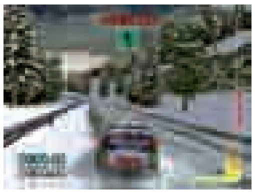
Codemasters made supreme efforts to provide a truly global range of varied and challenging courses to tear up in your super-charged Subaru. From the sun-bleached dust of Greece and Australia, through the rain-sodden UK and New Zealand courses, to the snow-filled stages of Sweden and Monte Carlo, the terrain runs the gamut of asphalt, gravel, dirt, mud, ice and snow, and offers a huge range of exciting driving challenges for the player



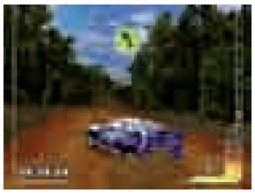
NEW ZEALAND A forgiving mix of gravel and mud eases you into the game, but watch the changeable weather.



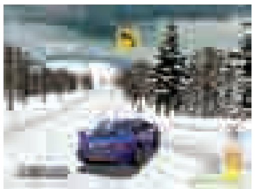
GREECE Dusty gravel tracks and some rather intimidating hair-pin bends provide a much greater challenge.



MONTE CARLO High, snow-covered mountain roads; you'll be thankful for those crash barriers.



AUSTRALIA Mostly loose gravel, but beware of the large amounts of dust your vehicle kicks up.



SWEDEN Much deeper snow, which banks hazardously at the road sides, and some nasty ice patches.



CORSICA Fast all-tarmac stages featuring some treacherously winding mountain passes.



INDONESIA Muddy, unpaved jungle roads, including a number of night stages, and the odd beach.



UNITED KINGDOM Plenty of chances to get your vehicle covered with mud, not to mention a smattering of snow.

» Colin in fine WRC form driving the famous blue Impreza.



» The excellent in-game 'replays' easily rivalled those seen in *Gran Turismo*.



» This Seventies Ford Escort Mk II is the game's own 'retro classic'.



» LOOKING BACK AT THE COMPILATIONS OF YESTERYEAR

BOX OF DELIGHTS!



I LOVE THE UNNECESSARY INTRO, WHICH TAKES ANYONE WHO ISN'T QUITE SURE OF HOW A COMPILATION PACK WORKS BY THE HAND AND EXPLAINS IT TO THEM. AND HOW ABOUT THAT CONFIDENT CLOSURE: 'AND OF COURSE IT'S BY OCEAN'. YES, THAT'S HOW YOU PROMOTE A PACK OF THIS GRANDEUR, WITH CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE.

We reckon that Ocean was always planning to include eight games on this compilation pack, but after struggling to think up a double entendre to use for its moniker it cunningly opted to give Yie Ar Kung Fu the chop and relegate it as a freebie. We're not bothered, mind, as this fab collection of classic, funny and peculiar titles is one of the finest collaborations of funny and peculiar classics that money can buy. Stuart Hunt kicks off our first look at classic compilation packs.

SHORT CIRCUIT

I spent hours on this game, hours steering my little robotic avatar into chairs, desks and plants. Tapping the fire button in the hope that the words 'interface socket not present' would somehow read 'interface socket present, congratulations you've completed Short Circuit'. However, it was never to be. Playing the role of Johnny 5, it was your job to find keys, open doors and try not to move too far to the right-hand side of the game map. Doing so would result in you entering a screen filled with green soldiers, who were waiting to shut you down before turning half of you into a toaster and the other half into an electronic tie rack.

TRIVIA The movie is based loosely on the movie *ET*. I think I can safely speak for the entire world when I say, thank God it wasn't based on the *ET* game.

MAG RATING 91% *Amtix!* It was branded with the Amtix! Accolade.

HEAD OVER HEELS

Bolstering this compilation's isometric pull is the genre's iconic classic *Head Over Heels*. It marks the finest title on this whole pack. In fact, any compilation pack featuring this game, and yes, that includes *Last Battle*, would be worth buying. We've talked about how awesome this game is more times than we've mentioned the words Darran, love, and *Strider* in the same sentence. But what the heck, once more won't hurt. *Head Over Heels* is so good that if you die before playing it, God reincarnates you until you do… apparently.

TRIVIA In an interview with *Edge* magazine, creator Jon Ritman admitted that he "made the whole game up and then added the bullshit in the last ten minutes". Which is weird, because the last ten minutes aren't actually that bad.

MAG RATING 97% *Crash* "The best fun you're likely to have with a Spectrum for quite some time."

COBRA

Based on the moderately successful generic action movie of the same name, *Cobra* was a side-scrolling run-and-gun' affair, which, like most early movie tie-ins, twisted with artistic licence to make it fit nicely into a computer game. Admittedly, it's been a few years since I watched the flick, but I don't remember every one of Stallone fights exploding afterwards, or seeing him continually avoiding parrot poo and punching pigeons in the face. Actually, I don't ever recall the scene when he took seven bazooka shots to the chest without flinching. But hey, like I said, it's been a while.

TRIVIA The movie was based on the novel *Fair Game* by Paula Gosling, which movie buffs will recall was later retold in that tepid action flop, *Fair Game*, which starred supermodel Cindy Crawford.

MAG RATING 8/10 *Your Sinclair* "Cobra isn't very original, but it's furious fun which will test you to the limits."

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

While the idea of putting Frankie Goes To Hollywood into their own videogame might sound stranger than fiction, even stranger is the actual game itself. The whole aim of *Frankie* was to complete a series of tasks to gain entry into the 'Pleasuredome': a place of wonder and excitement, a lucid home for euphoria-filled air molecules and pastel-shaded wallpaper. One small problem, though: this heavenly haven was only open to people with a life, people like rock stars and the tabloid savvy, not mundane little oiks like your protagonist. Frankie begins the game living a boring life in a bleak Thatcherite hellhole; that is until he finds a cadaver in a neighbour's house and his life takes a meaningful turn.

TRIVIA Certain versions of the game came packed with a separate cassette tape featuring a 15-minute live version of *Relax*, and some game tips read by Patrick Allen.

MAG RATING 5 Stars *Sinclair User* "*Frankie* is a beautiful program and an adventure of great imagination."



ARKANOID

Poor old Vaus – still coming to terms with the destruction of its mothership, he goes off the rails and starts vandalising interstellar bricks that guard an evil piece of Easter Island masonry, known as Doh. Armed with one energy ball, it seeks its revenge, setting out to clear the screens of all multi-hue. Although mimicked on Atari's *Breakout* (which was also based on *Pong)* Taito's arcade smash added a narrative, while also introducing power-ups and warps zones. By doing so, it helped to popularise the genre.

TRIVIA The NES version of *Arkanoid* was packed with its own controller. It was a smaller version of the 'spinner' on the arcade cab, and made playing the game much easier.

MAG RATING 59% *Crash* "Above average, and surprisingly addictive considering its ancient gameplay."

THE GREAT ESCAPE

A surprise hit for Ocean, and one that has featured on our hallowed Classic Game pages, no less. Released two decades after McQueen jumped that fence on his bike and Gordon Jackson made that monumental film faux pas at the bus station, Denton Design's classic escape-'em-up took the idea and title from the movie and created a nail-biting action adventure game set inside a bleak, isometric sandbox. Playing as a POW that's been captured by a jobsworth Fuehrer, you had to help your guy plot his escape through underground tunnels, while adhering to the camp's monotonous routine of roll calls and breakfast. It was ground-breaking for its day and one of the finest movie tie-ins ever… well, sort of.

TRIVIA The game was so good that *Sinclair User* ranked it number 23 in its top 100 games. And that's no small feat considering there were about 4 trillion games released on it! Something like that, anyway.

MAG RATING 9/10 *Your Sinclair "The Great Escape* is a well-presented, gently humorous, tense and brain-teasing winner."



WIZBALL

Jon Hare and Chris Yates's quirky little angular shooter amassed many fans when it made its C64 debut. The evil Zark has sapped all of the colour from Wizworld (well, except for a few shades of grey) and as Wizball, it is your job to shoot down his hovering minions and help instil colour back into the cheeks of his bland-looking world. Helping you was your feline cohort Catellite, who would soak up the differing coloured droplets of paint. It's widely regarded as a classic and injects a great change of pace into the pack.

TRIVIA In 1982, Ocean released a superficial sequel called *Wizkid*. Playing the role of Wizkid's disembodied head, you had to save Wizball, Catellite and her kittens from Zark, inside another colouring-in adventure.

MAG RATING 96% *Zzap!64* "A superlative piece of software. Slick in virtually every aspect."

YIE AR KUNG FU

Konami's kung-fu classic is certainly one of the best beat-'em-ups of the 8-bit era. In fact, it has a distinct air of those really old, out-of-sync Jackie Chan movies, where the fighting looks rigid and playful, yet staggeringly complicated. *Yie Ar Kung Fu* put you into the blue baggy pants of kung-fu supremo Oolong, as he faced off against an odd-looking band of martial-art Karnov lookalikes. What made the game so great was its annoyingly addictive gameplay. It came packed with a finely tuned difficulty curve and a fantastic fighting mechanic that made it feel more like a point-based fighter than the energy-bar sapper that it was.

TRIVIA Oolong apparently means Black Dragon. And there we were thinking it meant Black Dinosaur. Geez, how stupid do we feel right now.

MAG RATING 80% *Crash* "Imagine's conversion of the hit arcade game is one of the most enjoyable beat-'em-ups."

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE What made this pack so special was the variety that it offered. You pretty much had most genre bases covered here: a beat-'em-up, a shooter, a couple of quirky titles and then *Cobra* thrown in for good measure.

92.4567% OUT OF 10

Overall: By adding all of the scores above, dividing it by the number of games on the compilation and then multiplying that number by the amount of times the word 'them' features in this issue of the mag, we've come up with our recently patented foolproof rating system.

THE MAKING OF...

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

He may have started out by trying to destroy a relationship, but Donkey Kong would later be instrumental in bringing two of the industry's most fertile developers together, setting the barrel rolling for some of the most iconic games ever released. Stuart Hunt speaks to Donkey Kong Country's designer Gregg Mayles to find out more





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** RARE
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-10



The genesis of any game, particularly in the early days of its development, always begins with conceptual drawings, sketches and inks. So when Nintendo approached Rare and asked it to create a game that would have 'better graphics than *Aladdin*' you could argue that it was effectively asking Rare to out-draw Walt Disney. That's like trying to beat Hulk Hogan in an arm wrestle.

"We were experimenting with a very early form of 3D technology before *Donkey Kong Country* (*DKC*) began, but actually trying to implement an ambitious method into a real game situation was difficult," recalls lead designer Gregg Mayles. "At the time, software houses outside Japan were producing graphics that were considered superior to those produced inside Japan. Nintendo visited us and we demonstrated a proprietary graphics system that we were toying with, which became ACM [Advanced Computer Modelling]. As a result they asked us to do a game using the Donkey Kong character."

Facing a tight schedule, while trying to fully come to grips with this new technology, a team of 12 people were assigned to the game – the most that Rare had ever assembled for one project. It's believed that the team initially went to the nearby Twycross Zoo to study gorillas to ensure Donkey Kong looked and moved believably, but Gregg admits that the truth was a little less colourful.

"Yes, we did go to the zoo and observe the gorillas, but found that when they did move it was completely unsuitable for a fast-paced videogame, so all of the animation had to be done by hand," he says. "We went through about 15 different versions of how DK could move. DK's movement in the final game is based loosely on how a horse moves, but I recall laughing at some of the other animal-themed attempts – including a rabbit and a frog."

Donkey Kong Country was praised for its stunning looks. The characters of Donkey and Diddy looked solid, crisp and innovative – a result of the new process of 3D game design.

"The use of 3D modelling was an alien concept to us (and the industry) at the time. Once the character was modelled in 3D we could view it at any angle and render 0out the frames of 3D animation that were then converted to 2D images. Previously, animation was extremely labour-intensive and required great artistic skill to get the angles and lighting correct. This new computer-assisted method enabled us to produce animation quicker, to a higher standard and with a previously unseen realistic look," recalls Gregg.

He admits that Rare turned to Kong's mean master for inspiration when considering how the game and its level construction should play out. "For me, *Super Mario Bros. 3* was the ultimate pinnacle for 2D platform games. We



» Donkey gets spiked by a starfish. "Geez, man, just try to remember you're a giant ape."



» Hopping onto Enguarde the swordfish makes 'Coral Capers' a swim in the park.

wanted the same kind of structure, but we also wanted it to be extremely flowing – where a skilled player could move effortlessly through the levels at great speed," says Gregg. "The stages were painstakingly arranged so that the player could 'go first time' past obstacles (ie if there was a swinging rope then when it came on screen it was swinging towards you so you could jump onto it straight away). Watching a skilled player in full flow on levels such as Barrel Cannon Canyon is probably the best example of this. If you time everything correctly, you can get through the level efficiently and impressively."

Rare needed to ensure that its dazzling duo would be framed inside a suitably striking world. As the *Donkey Kong* universe – save for a few ladders and girders – hadn't really been explored in any great detail, Rare had the chance to leave a significant mark on the series. It introduced a number of new Kong's into the game and even smudged things up by supplanting a brand new Donkey Kong into the lead role.

"We initially wanted to include DK Junior as Donkey's sidekick," says Gregg. "Diddy Kong was our update of Junior, but Nintendo felt that the character was too different and either wanted Junior to be included in his original look or the name of our new character to be changed. We felt that our new character perfectly suited the updated universe of *Donkey Kong* so we kept our character and gave him a different name. We had a sheet of paper that we passed around where potential names were scribbled down. Some were hilariously bad: Diet DK, DK Lite and Titchy Kong. We settled on Dinky Kong, but after legal advice decided to change it to Diddy."

Each of the game's wonderfully diverse levels served up something completely unique. From Endor-esque tree houses to an exhilarating *Indiana Jones* mine cart parody, the exhausting level of detail and variety of its stages really helped to set it apart from its peers. While the game feels effortlessly fluid, Gregg admits that the memory-hungry 3D tools that they used to fashion its complexity proved painstaking to wield.

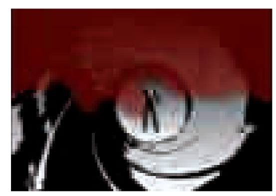
"The backgrounds were the bane of the project," he admits. "The memory used by this single screen was more than the whole cartridge! The only way to have large backgrounds in that era was to ensure that elements of the background repeated. We wanted a background that looked natural and didn't appear to repeat, but achieving this was far from straightforward. We used a very slow method of cutting up elements of the single-screen environment by hand and then arranging them so that they repeated, but the key was to do it so the

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

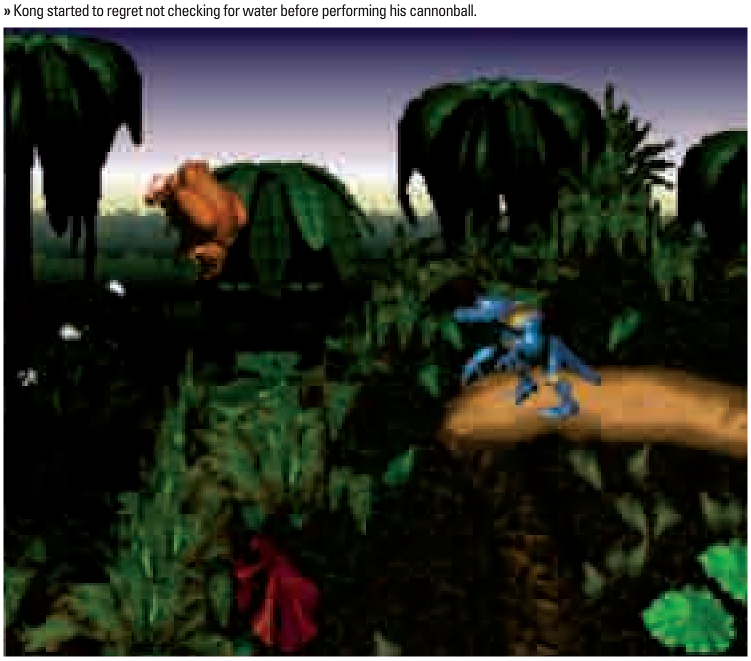
GOLDENEYE 007 (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1997

SNAKE RATTLE 'N' ROLL
SYSTEMS: NES, MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1991 (NES)

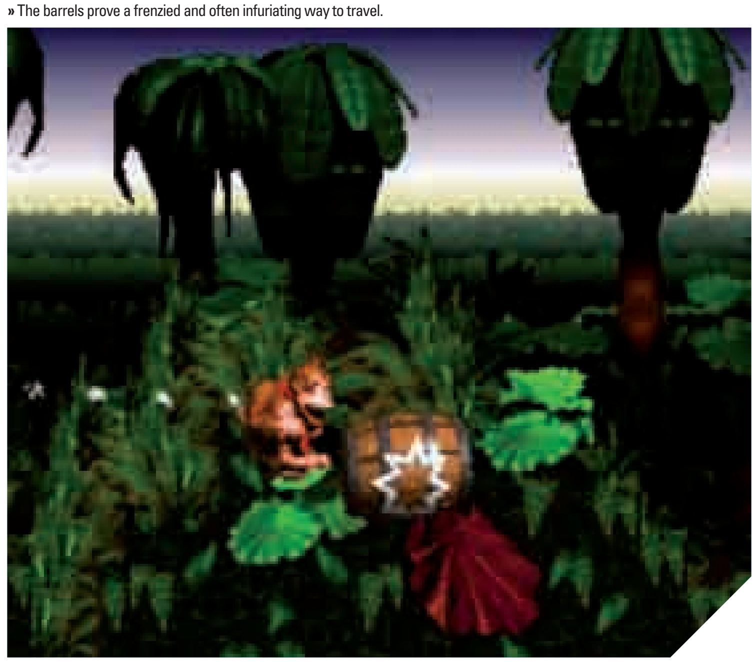
JET FORCE GEMINI
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1999



» Kong started to regret not checking for water before performing his cannonball.



» The barrels prove a frenzied and often infuriating way to travel.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

YOU'RE HAVING A GIRAFFE!

Where most platform games will have you powering up via skittish skateboards, rare Chaos Emeralds or feathers that turn you into a racoon, Rare wanted to incorporate something a little different for *Donkey Kong Country.* "We wanted Donkey to have some special abilities, but didn't want to go down the usual route of just picking up a power-up," explains Gregg. "Building on the idea of having Diddy Kong as an on-screen friend, we extended this so that the player could also call upon the services of some animal buddies as special abilities. We wanted the animal abilities to be exciting. I really wanted to include a giraffe, but its proposed ability of Donkey climbing up its neck to reach higher areas was superseded by the frog who could effortlessly jump anywhere. I've always disliked the frog to an extent, because of this, and have never managed to include a giraffe in a game since!"



backgrounds retained as much of the 3D-modelled quality as possible, while trying to disguise the repeated elements."

Donkey Kong Country is renowned for introducing a buddy system into its gameplay, a feature that Rare would continue to tweak throughout the series. Gregg explains how the unique tagging system came about.

"The second character was initially designed as an 'extra hit'. If the player had both characters and the leading one was hit, the second one could continue and the player would not die," says Gregg. "An early decision was made to keep the screen as clutter free as possible, so that ruled out an energy bar. It had to be visual. Basing it on *Mario*'s 'big Mario returns to little Mario' system we thought a second character could perform this function, look visually impressive and give the player a feeling that they were not alone in the game. As we developed the game and its sequels further, the second character became more of an integral part of the games rather than just being an extra hit."

Nintendo is known to be extremely shielding towards its IPs, so handing over one of its most iconic franchises is something that you'd expect would attract a tremendous amount of protocol and interference from the game giant, but Gregg says this wasn't the case.

"Nintendo were extremely busy at the time so we were left to ourselves," he says. "It was an unprecedented thing for them to do, entrusting one of their most prominent and fondly remembered IP's with a relatively small and unknown UK development house. I was young and naive enough not to realise just how crucial this game was for Rare – all I wanted to do was create a game that could be remembered. Miyamoto provided us with some suggestions for DK's look and it was a sketch of his that included the tie."

Ironically, mirroring the wall of doubt that *Donkey Kong* faced from its American distributors back in 1981, Rare's treatment of the series was met with similar misgivings, when the team travelled to Kyoto to unveil the game to it's original creators.

"We made a memorable visit to Nintendo's HQ in Japan. I was surprisingly calm at the time, despite it being my first visit to what many would

> "WHEN IT WAS FIRST ANNOUNCED THAT IT WAS A SNES GAME, THERE WAS A MOMENT'S STUNNED SILENCE BEFORE EVERYONE STARTED CLAPPING"



» "Look man, rats eat cheese, we eat bananas, you got that?"

» "Um, that's not very good, is it?"



» Fancy a nice shampoo? Visit the 'Stop & Go' level.





» Leapfrogging from vulture's heads proves a good way to safely traverse the gaps.

class as the Mecca of videogames," says Gregg. "We were there to demo an early version of the game to the people that created the original character. It was the first time many of the people at Nintendo had seen the game, and our radical approach with the graphics didn't initially go down too well. Mr Yokoi [Game Boy creator] remarked that 'It looked too 3D'. Miyamoto was much quicker to appreciate what we had done and gave his approval. Mr Miyamoto and his staff used their unparalleled experience to give us some input on how we could smooth out a few rough edges and suggested that DK would look good with a hand-slap move. We thought this would be cool too, so even though we were only a few weeks away from the deadline we included it."

DK Country was released during a period of shift in the industry. It could have easily been drowned out by the noise made by the gigantic visual leap that 32-bit gaming had made. Thankfully, *DK Country*'s release proved to be just as seismic. Selling over 8 million copies, it became one of the biggest-selling 16-bit games of all time. Gregg remembers the first time they showcased the game.

"The conference built up to *DKC*'s announcement at the very end," he says. "People were expecting something big, but they thought it was going to be about the N64. The game looked spectacular and I heard people around me saying that Project Reality (N64's development name) looked great. Then when it was announced it was a SNES game, there was a moment's stunned silence before everyone started clapping (apart from me, who was wondering how we were going to finish it on time). I think I had a few celebratory beers during the Nintendo party that followed."

When asking Gregg how he reacts when people tell them that they actually prefer *Donkey Kong Country* to Miyamoto's *Super Mario World*, he says he feels honoured but is quick to jump to *Mario*'s defence.

"I think the style of play is very different; *Super Mario World* was sublime and intricate, best appreciated at a slower speed, whereas *Donkey Kong Country* was extravagant and brash, better played at a faster rate," he explains. "If I was honest though, I would say *Mario* is the better game. My personal opinion is that *DKC2* was a better game than *DKC* as we tried to incorporate more of the intricacies that made *Mario* so compelling but at the same time retaining our desire for fast, fun gameplay."

CRITICAL KONGVERSIONS

Rare's *DK Country* series has been ported to GBA, GBC and the original Game Boy, with the latter – due to its technical limitations – more of a watered-down port, lacking the vibrancy and omitting a few of Kong's animal buddies. Gregg explains why he feels the portable ports of the games failed to emit the same impact as the originals. "Porting a game onto a different system is often a no-win situation," he says. "If it's 100% accurate, then the original flaws are usually pointed out. If the port is less than 100% accurate then not only does it usually retain the flaws of the original but its own as well. Getting a port to be 100% when not done by the originators is almost impossible, as many of the subtleties and tricks have been forgotten. I think the GBA version was a decent port given the reduced screen size, the screen brightness issues and the short development time."



"DKC'S RELEASE PROVED SEISMIC. SELLING OVER 8 MILLION COPIES, IT BECAME ONE OF THE BIGGEST-SELLING 16-BIT GAMES OF ALL TIME"

» "So you promise me you're not one of those poisonous toads?"



» 'Stop & Go' is one of the more demanding stages. You need to turn the lights red to safely pass these invincible foes.



Face Off...

Potty Pigeon

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF REMAKES AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET, BUT WHICH ONES ARE BETTER THAN THE GAMES THAT ORIGINALLY INSPIRED THEM? IN A BRAND NEW FEATURE, RETRO GAMER ATTEMPTS TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT ONCE AND FOR ALL...

THE ORIGINAL



- **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **SYSTEM:** SPECTRUM 48K
- **PRICE:** £6.95

PIGEONS ARE DISGUSTING CREATURES

Sure, they look all sweet when they coo around your feet, desperately trying to gather up all the bread you throw to them, but don't be fooled by the cute-looking facade. These birds are public enemy number one and like to spread diseases like histoplasmosis and cryptococcosis when they're not blindly snatching seeds from your outspread hands. Regular scavengers of city bins – little wonder they're often referred to as flying rats – and the kind donators of pigeon lung, they really do fill us with a loathing normally reserved for reruns of the *Teletubbies* or people who eat loudly in restaurants while you're simply trying to enjoy the opulence.

It seems strange then that despite our loathing for these feathered foes, we've found ourselves strangely drawn to the adventures of one particularly potty pigeon (or Percy as he's known to Spectrum and C64 owners).

Playing as Percy, your aim is to simply fly around the game's 11 screens and collect worms to feed your hungry chicks. Along the way, Percy has to contend with giant spiders, toy helicopters and poisonous plants and a continually dropping energy bar that can, fortunately, be replenished by resting on the ground or at your nest. Percy may be small, but he's far from defenceless, and can unleash turds – no doubt loaded with histoplasmosis – to temporarily stun his many enemies.

Interestingly, the C64 title, which Gordon King's remake isn't based on, is an altogether different affair thanks to its hypersensitive controls that will have you screaming at the screen in frustration. Of course, this isn't to say the Spectrum game is perfect, but the slightly more sedate pace and precise controls help to make it far more manageable to play. Receiving above average scores at the time of release, *Potty Pigeon* is a surprisingly fun game. Just don't play the Commodore 64 version.



THE REMAKE



- **CREATED BY:** GORDON KING
- **RELEASED:** 2004
- **SYSTEM:** PC
- **TOOLS USED:** MULTIMEDIA FUSION
- **DOWNLOAD FROM:** WWW.RETRO-RELEVANCE.CO.UK/POTTY.HTM

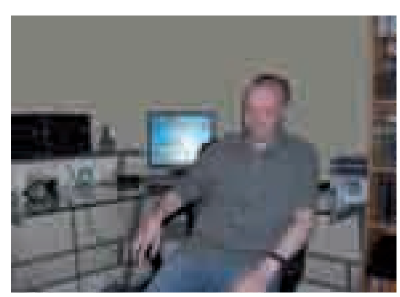
CATCH THE PIGEON

After falling in love with Gremlin Graphics's Spectrum version of *Potty Pigeon*, we're delighted to be able to tell you that Gordon King's remake is an outstanding effort that really captures the vibrancy and playfulness of the 1984 Spectrum original. To begin with, collision detection is far tighter than it was before, so it is now possible to take more risks when collecting those pesky pink annelids. The graphics also do an extremely good job of emulating the spirit and feel of the Spectrum outing. Thankfully, there are no more white clouds for your tiny pigeon to get lost in.

This polished re-creation of *Potty Pigeon* is not without its problems, though, and while the improved controls and nippier pace work in Gordon's favour, certain elements do make his game needlessly tricky to play. The biggest annoyance of all is the bird that follows you around many of the screens, and collides with you and causing you to drop your worm. In the Spectrum game he's the same size as your pigeon, but in Gordon's PC title he is several times bigger meaning that he is far more difficult to avoid.

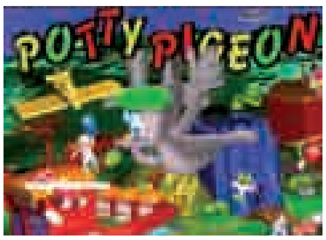
Another niggling aspect of the remade version is the fact that your pigeon now appears to be made of rubber and will often bounce off certain objects. This can be especially annoying when that huge bird is right on your tail. None of these issues are genuinely game breaking, however, and overall Gordon's - there he is on the right - remake of *Potty Pigeon* manages to push all the right buttons.





THE FACE OFF





THE TITLE SCREENS
A bit of a tough one to call. We're impressed with the colourful look of Gordon's effort and the fact that it features lots of classic Gremlin characters, but we love the look of anguish on Percy's face as he feeds his offspring in the original game. Oh, and it's got a gremlin on it as well.

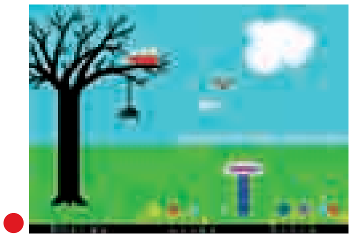
● ORIGINAL 1 ● REMAKE 0





THE AESTHETICS
There's a lot to be said about the cheerful, bold colours of the original Spectrum outing, but we've found ourselves being constantly drawn to Ric Lumb's re-imagined villains (even if some of them are annoyingly oversized) and bright, Day-Glo world.

● ORIGINAL 1 ● REMAKE 1





THE GAMEPLAY
While we really enjoy Gordon's remake, several aspects tend to make it unnecessarily hard to play. Avoiding some enemies in the game can be tricky, and we've lost count of the times Percy dropped a worm because he bounced off a tree and flew into the oversized bird following him. So, the Spectrum just pips it to the post.

● ORIGINAL 2 ● REMAKE 1

OVERALL WINNER – SPECTRUM It may have been forgotten by many and played by less, but *Potty Pigeon* on the Spectrum proves that sometimes the originals are the best.

THE INTERVIEW

Retro Gamer: Why did you decide to start remaking games?
Gordon King: Like a lot my of my fellow remakers out there, I fell in love with the few remakes that were available at the time. *Manic Miner* and *KO99* were the ones that impressed me the most and inspired me to start dabbling in the scene myself. Initially, I started making my own games that featured well-known characters such as Monty Mole. They barely resembled anything similar to the originals and to be quite blunt are absolutely awful in retrospect. Hence the reason some of my earlier works are unavailable to download these days.

RG: Why remake Potty Pigeon? It was never exactly a massive title?
GK: Yeah, it's a bit of a minor-league game, isn't it? I have a real fond memory of this game and really enjoyed it as a kid. Playing it all these years later certainly ruins the 'rose-tinted glasses' view of it, but I liked the idea of the challenge to spruce it up and add new life to it. I think the final decision to remake it was due to the encouragement of the artist, Ric Lumb. He was, and still is, fanatical about Gremlin Graphics games and if I chose this as the project, I was guaranteed to see this game to fruition, as he would keenly do all the sprites for me.

RG: How long did it take to create and what did you use to code it?
GK: It was created in conjunction with the Retro Remakes 2004 summer competition. The time limit was three months, if I remember correctly, and I think I achieved completion with about a week and a half to go until the close of the comp. What I do remember though is burning the candle at both ends to try to get the game completed – I wasn't going to bed until about two each morning, which wasn't really compatible with my morning moods. As I was relying on Ric for the graphics, some nights would grind to a halt whereas other nights were very productive. It is always harder when you have more than just yourself to rely upon and you need to keep the communication lines flowing, especially as there was about 300 miles between us. As with all my games I use Clickteam's MMF. It suits me well, as I prefer the event-table style as opposed to coding.

RG: Why did you decide to make the bird that follows you around larger than the one in the original?
GK: That was purely down to Ric. I left him with the executive decision for anything to do with the artwork. If you knew him, you'd learn to appreciate his fixation with cute, big cartoon characters. In hindsight, it is a little large, isn't it? I think it makes the AI of it look rather clumsy.

RG: Why did you give your pigeon physics (he bounces of the tree when dropping worms off)?
GK: Have you tried sliding down the chute yet? Initially, I tried to copy how it worked in the original. You'd think a simple collision detection routine to stop the pigeon moving would be an easy chore? Think again when it comes to MMF. Sometimes this program can be a little volatile and create bugs where bugs should not be. Sadly, this was the case with this routine and it was doing my head in. I left it until the end and decided to create a simple bounce as time was running out. Personally, I thought it was alright, but a lot of the negative comments are about the confusing 3D environment in terms of what is 'solid' and what is not. Those comments came from people who have never played the original before.

"IT DIVIDED THE OPINIONS IN THE REVIEW TEAM, SOME ENJOYED IT AND SOME GOT FRUSTRATED BY IT" GORDON KING ON HIS REMAKE

RG: Was there anything about the original game that you didn't like and did you attempt to put it right in your remake?
GK: What I did like and this was purely Ric's idea was to create a real feeling of a spherical world as opposed to the wrap-around of the original. He achieved this by mapping it all in his 3D tools (whatever they were) and allowed for adjacent key locations to be seen in the background. You can see the tree, the power station and so on from other rooms in the game. I'm really pleased with that and it's a subtlety that goes unnoticed.

RG: What was the reception like when Potty Pigeon was first completed?
GK: It divided the opinions in the review team, some enjoyed it and some got frustrated by it. Yet again, I think this came down to whether or not they had played the original or not. To be honest, apart from the dreaded scrutiny of a competition judge, I didn't really get that much feedback. I did hear from Shaun Hollingworth (the game's author), though, and he was very complimentary. That made it all worth it.

RG: What do you have in the works?
GK: Hmm, I've tried and I've tried to get back into the scene. I've sort of evolved over to making music for people's remakes. In saying that, I do intend to give it a bash again and I'm looking at a few options I have. One of them is *Alchemist*, which is another low-key game. Only time will tell.

THE MAKING OF...

DIABLO

The creation of a new genre? A unique aesthetic? The most intuitive control scheme ever? The guys at Blizzard North must have sold their souls to make a game like Diablo as it featured all this and more. Alexander Gambotto-Burke investigates, the ground-breaking PC game, crucifixes and holy water





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** BLIZZARD NORTH
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



The 'Secret Cow' level. If you've played a *Diablo* game before, you'll know what that means. If you haven't, here are the basics: once players became acquainted with both *Diablo*'s online and offline components – after killing enough demons to earn a fail-safe ticket to the upper echelons of heaven – rumours began to spread of a hidden realm. And, inexplicably: mysterious, semi-interactive cows belied its location. A land of untold treasures and new enemies, the Secret Cow level tormented believers, demanding they click on the unresponsive cows just a few more thousand times to see whether the portal would finally open.

It never did, primarily because the Cow level didn't exist. Blizzard received endless queries, suggestions and complaints about said level (and its whereabouts), but after some time, players finally threw in the cowbell. (Just as well that Blizzard included a real Secret Cow level in *Diablo II* as an Easter egg.) The Cow level fiasco perfectly illustrates *Diablo*'s infectious appeal – the game was so brilliantly addictive that when players really had exhausted all available options, they began click-humping 2D cows to find more.

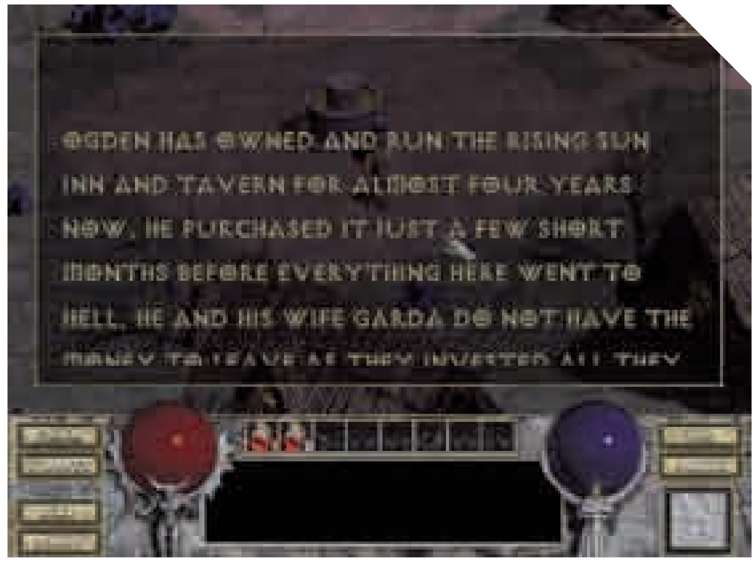
Diablo brought in gamers of many different tastes and persuasions, despite essentially being an RPG. And RPGs in the mid-Nineties weren't doing particularly well. "People laughed at us for pitching it," confesses Dave Brevik, the chief visionary officer at Flagship Studios, and designer behind *Diablo*, *Diablo II* and the upcoming *Hellgate: London*. "RPGs were not selling at all. They were the curse of the industry."

The reason *Diablo* was so successful could be that it wasn't a 'true' RPG – or, at least, it wasn't one of the more common types of RPG. All combat was executed in real-time and gameplay proceeded at a blistering pace. Enemies were often tragically weak, but arrived in deliriously gory swarms. And to top it all off, *Diablo* was more addictive than *World Of Warcraft*… well, almost. Each step you took compelled you to try one more level, go for one more boss, or hunt for that elusive 'unique' item you knew you'd sell for an astonishing amount on Battle.net.

You might wonder where Blizzard got the idea for such a game. Brevik lifts the veil, "There were many, many games that influenced *Diablo*'s design, but if I had to narrow it down to a handful, I would say that *Moria* – a Unix-based text game – and *Warcraft* were the biggest," he confesses. "*Moria* was a big influence on the core structure of the game: it had a single town with a few shops and an infinitely deep, random dungeon down below. It also had lots of random items, and a second version of the game sported named unique monsters. *Warcraft* was an influence because of the twist it had put on traditional gaming: what was turn based in the past,



» Enjoy the fresh air while you can. Those dungeon don't come with air conditioning, you know.



» No adventure game is complete without a sprawling lengthy opening.

Warcraft made real-time. This is the twist we applied to RPGs with *Diablo*."

It was that real-time twist that changed mainstream perception of RPGs, forever. Rather than engage you in turn-based or pseudo-real-time bouts, *Diablo* allowed you to fiercely attack multiple enemies, often simultaneously. And how did it do that? Well, first, by abandoning the traditional *Dungeons & Dragons* framework. "Because of the mechanics of *Diablo*'s real-time environment, we had to change how the numbers worked for this sort of game," explains Brevik. "It had to be balanced in such a way that it was action packed and involving. With pen and paper RPGs, fights can take a long time, because each round can last ten to fifteen minutes in a normal-sized group. As a result, the numbers are different. You don't want there to be 25 rounds, but you might want that out of a *Diablo* boss monster."

Tweaking the numbers was the first step to action-RPG nirvana, but there was something else needed to finish the puzzle – that device that revolutionised PC operation, the mouse. Everything in the game, from combat to casting spells and selecting options to opening doors or even abusing the aforementioned cows, was done with those left and right buttons. Soon, people who didn't know *Pool Of Radiance* were elatedly clicking away at *Diablo*'s unholy legions.

"We joked that *Diablo* needed to pass the 'mom test'," Brevik laughs, "so we asked ourselves: is it simple enough that my mom could play it, or will she not understand it? If it was too complicated then we either changed it so that it wasn't, or introduced it over time in a step-by-step fashion so that complex concepts were broken down over time. We deliberately made the game extremely easy to use and accessible to a wide range of gamers. This was done to widen the audience and make it more of a mass-market kind of game. The core gamers still mattered to us, but we wanted it simple enough so that anyone could play it."

Given that repetition becomes tedious, how did Blizzard make sure *Diablo* didn't end up like a U2 single?

"There are many factors that go into making it less repetitive," says Brevik. "But in the long run, many people feel that it becomes repetitive anyhow, so we try to layer in rewards. There are rewards given at different intervals and of varying degrees that keep you interested in playing just a bit more: 'Oh! I'm about to level my character', 'I just went down to a new area and it looks interesting', or 'I just happened upon a new quest and I think I can finish it before I stop.' All of these keep the game interesting and keep the player involved."

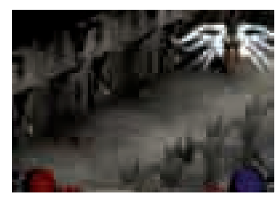
Furthermore, it was difficult for *Diablo* to ever feel repetitive because you almost never played the same game twice: everything other than the central hub, Tristram, was randomly generated (that includes dungeons, weapons, armour, and monsters). "I love random content", Brevik says, "because you never know what's going to happen. With planned-out levels, you can balance the game easier and create certain situations you want the player to go through. But once the player goes through that content once, it's far less interesting to go through

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

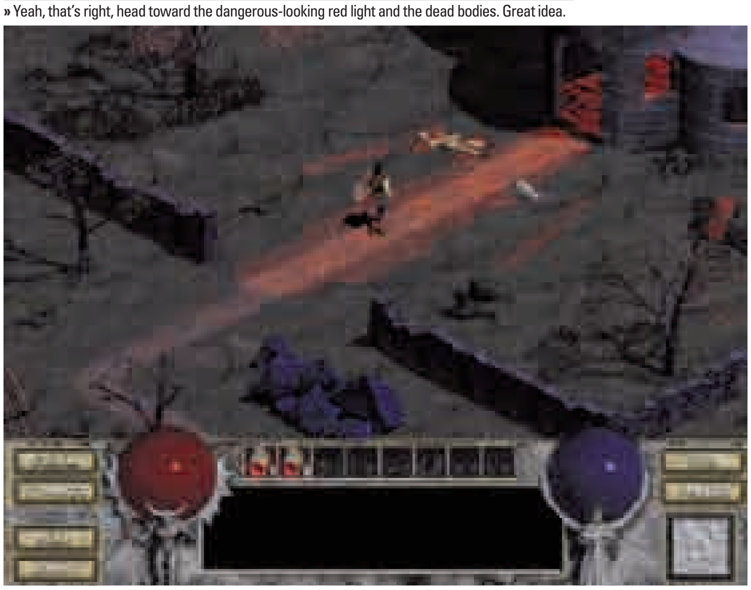
JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE
SYSTEMS: MEGA DRIVE, SNES
YEAR: 1995

DIABLO II (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2000

DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2001



» Yeah, that's right, head toward the dangerous-looking red light and the dead bodies. Great idea.



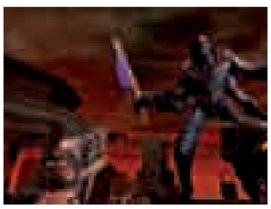
» If you're not careful it's easy to get overrun by enemies, so it's best to adventure with a friend.



DIABLO

DIABLO 3? SORT OF…

After *StarCraft II*'s recent announcement, most *Diablo* zealots have come to the grim realisation that the third game in their beloved series may not appear for some time. However, all hope is not lost. A splinter group of the original *Diablo* team, Flagship Studios, is almost ready to ship *Hellgate: London*, arguably *Diablo*'s spiritual successor. The game features sophisticated randomised content, compulsive hack-and-slash, a complementary (and complimentary) MMO component and demons – so basically, everything you've been missing about *Diablo*.



it again. We wanted people to play our games over and over again and this is how we accomplished that."

One of the most popular ways to enjoy *Diablo* over and over again is through its multiplayer component. *Diablo*'s multiplayer was so compelling, in fact, that it spawned a substantial (and persistent) community. Originally, though, Blizzard North didn't realise the potential of such a component – there wasn't actually going to be any multiplayer at all. "About six months before the project deadline", Brevik notes, "Blizzard's president at the time came to us and proposed Battle.net. This was obviously a superb idea and we agreed to do it even though it meant a ton of extra work. We had to go back through the code and retro-fit much of multiplayer into it."

Usually when developers put so much energy into creating absolutely flawless gameplay, the story can often take a back seat. Not Blizzard, though. It put a lot of thought into creating a new, darkly refreshing fantasy setting, far from the Tolkien reruns that gamers had become overly acquainted with. "We wanted to make a less warm-and-fuzzy type of game and put RPGs in a darker place," Brevik says. "I was never a big fan of elves, unicorns and dragons. I thought that a zombie-infested game with demons was a far more attractive prospect than the Tolkien-esque stuff. We wanted a far grittier atmosphere to the game. I never really set out to make it strictly for a more mature audience, but we made it the way we found most interesting and different."



» That zombie's got the taste for blood and he's coming your way.

If the gothic art direction wasn't enough, *Diablo*'s unforgettably haunting guitar-and-synth music walked all over traditional fantasy scores. Brevik concedes that it was all part of the plan, "It was all about the mood. We wanted to twist up everything," he says. "Matt Ulemen is a brilliant composer who did a fantastic job with the game. We knew we would end up with something unconventional when we hired him. It helped us break many of the traditional RPG clichés."

Players quickly took to Blizzard's cliché-smashing ways; *Diablo* was a massive success. Oddly though, when *Diablo II* was released four years later, gamers were shocked and perhaps a little disappointed at the similarities between the two titles. "There were many changes between the two", Brevik explains, "but I think that the people that said they were too similar were so hyped up [about the new release] that they had imagined *Diablo II* would be so much more than it was. This happens all the time. *Diablo II* didn't have state-of-the-art graphics, and the first hour of

> "USUALLY WHEN DEVELOPERS PUT SO MUCH ENERGY INTO CREATING FLAWLESS GAMEPLAY, THE STORY CAN OFTEN TAKE A BACK SEAT. NOT BLIZZARD, THOUGH"

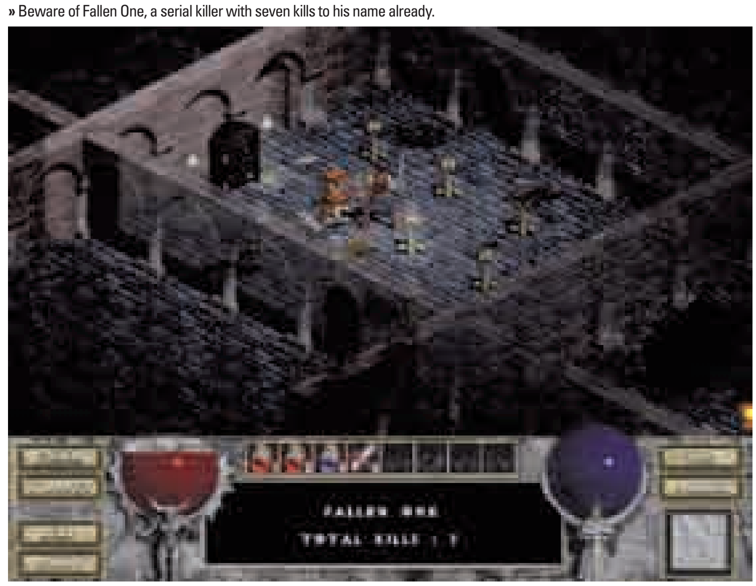
» Collecting treasure makes up for the many dangers.



» We wouldn't go down there, if we were you. But you're not likely to listen to us, are you?



» Beware of Fallen One, a serial killer with seven kills to his name already.





» Many dungeons were several layers deep. Better get your exploring hat on.

gameplay was very similar to *Diablo*, so some people were initially disappointed," he admits. "The use of 2D graphics initially hurt reviews, but as the numbers showed, in the long run it didn't hurt at all. I recently heard that more people are playing *Diablo II* now than ever before. This doesn't surprise me much, at all. There are a lot of PCs out there that can't handle many of the games today. This opens it up for games like *Diablo II*."

Indeed, *Diablo II* became so popular because it took the progressive accessibility of its predecessor and turned it into a far superior game. Despite complaints, *Diablo II* turned out to be exactly what gamers had wanted: bigger (four times larger, approximately), prettier, more personalised (players' avatars now reflected exactly what they were wearing), more random (large outdoor environments, unique items, and named monsters were all generated on-the-fly), and injected with film-quality cinematics and NPCs. The sequel ended up as the game that the original *Diablo* should have been.

"We were able to implement many of the ideas we had during *Diablo*'s development but couldn't put in due to time constraints," Brevik admits. "We also listened to the gamers and used their feedback to fuel some of the changes we made."

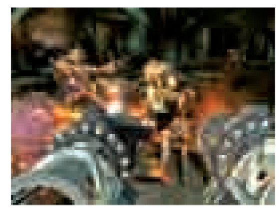
Multiplayer included the biggest changes. The Battle.net interface was retooled, players could now go through the entire game together (rather than select parts, as in *Diablo*), and a special Hardcore mode was created. This new, improved multiplayer proved so popular with players that Blizzard's net code couldn't keep up. The result? Bugs. "The game was much more popular than we had ever imagined", Brevik enthuses, "and we were not ready for it. We expected about ten per cent of the numbers we were getting, and the system just wasn't designed to handle what was being thrown at it. We worked very hard for the coming months and years to solidify it. Eventually it became very stable and reliable."

Which is, in many ways, the perfect description of the games themselves. *Diablo* and its sequel haven't dated at all; the design choices that Blizzard made ensured that the games will continue to be aesthetically appealing to gamers, no matter how far graphics technology advances over the years. And what's more, the gameplay is so tight and robust that very few modern games, convoluted as they often are, can compete. I mean, if you can get gamers, across the world, clicking cows to milk every last drop out of your project, then you know you're dealing with something very special.

"DIABLO II BECAME SO POPULAR BECAUSE IT TOOK THE PROGRESSIVE ACCESSIBILITY OF ITS PREDECESSOR AND TURNED IT INTO A FAR SUPERIOR GAME"

DEVIL'S MUSIC

The Blizzard North team churned out what is undoubtedly the most demonic videogame of all time with *Diablo*. The hellish fascination hasn't abated for many of them, either; they're now working on *Hellgate: London* at Flagship Studios. And yet, somewhat surprisingly, they're hardly the unholy fiends you might imagine. Bill Roper, a Flagship founder, even manages to distract himself from his demonic duties with a bit of *Renaissance*-themed folk singing, "I've been a musician for as long as I can remember", he says, "and I still sing and play as much as my schedule allows. My longest running project, the Poxy Boggards, is in its 13th year and we're recording our sixth album! I can't imagine a day going by without making some kind of music."



» It's just one little zombie. Kill it!



» Mods for *Diablo* are extremely popular: here's a shot from Escape From The Afterlife.



» "I wish I hadn't left my GPS at home."



Last Battle

Retro Shamer

FOR EVERY GOOD GAME RELEASED THERE ARE A LOT OF BAD ONES. FOR EVERY DOOM THERE'S A REDNECK RAMPAGE, FOR EVERY STREET FIGHTER 2 THERE'S A STREET SMART AND FOR EVERY PRO EVO THERE'S A CHRIS KAMARA'S STREET SOCCER. THIS MEANS MANY GAMES MAY NEVER GET THE CHANCE TO APPEAR ON THE HALLOWED PAGES OF THIS MAGAZINE. WELL, ALL THAT'S ABOUT TO CHANGE WITH OUR NEW FEATURE, RETRO SHAMER. SO CHEER UP, ET; WIPE THOSE EYES, WALLY BEAR AND THE 'NO' GANG, YOU'VE JUST BEEN GRANTED A 'GET OUT OF HELL FREE' CARD

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** IN-HOUSE
» **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** STREETS OF RAGE



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The box art gives all the right signals of how bad this game is going to be. It has a man that looks like a young Arnie, dressed in tight clothes, doing that really strange kick your character does in the game. The chap that he's parried the attack from has captured the most amazing impression of a feeble soldier ever – check out the pathetic posture, the neck at an angle and the slightly feminine-looking hands. Also, look at that fantastic drawing of a bland wall, which is pointlessly askew as if in some weird dream state. Yep, it's fair to say there should be no reason you'd ever purchase this if you saw it in a shop window.



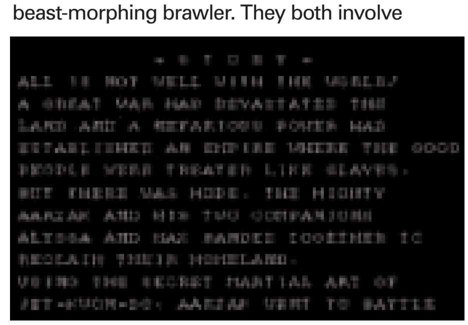
» When Aarzak eventually fills up his power meter he bursts out of his jacket to signal that he means business. You better get out of his way there, purple dudes.

This early game from Sega could have been the *Spinal Tap* of the side-scrolling beat-'em-up genre. In fact, if the game was trying to be intentionally lampoon, it could be used as *the* benchmark for parody.

The game opens with 40 screens of text – proudly talking you through its entire story (even the ending), which is frankly just too confusing to detail here. It scrolls so fast across your TV screen, it would probably even cause speed-reading robot Johnny 5 to pull his head off in frustration. Essentially, though, you play a guy who must rescue a girl and free a dystopian world from the maniacal grip of a horrible man who knows some freaky kung fu.

Let's be honest, you'd think it would be pretty hard to mess up a videogame that's based on the *Fist Of The North Star* anime. Consider it: heads imploding, fingers being stuck through torsos and flurrying fist fights. Well, the Japanese version did feature exploding domes. Sadly, though, Sega was obviously so afraid that kids might try to blow each other's heads to bits that it responsibly omitted it from its UK release.

Released a year after *Altered Beast, Last Battle* strangely seems to borrow quite a bit from the beast-morphing brawler. They both involve

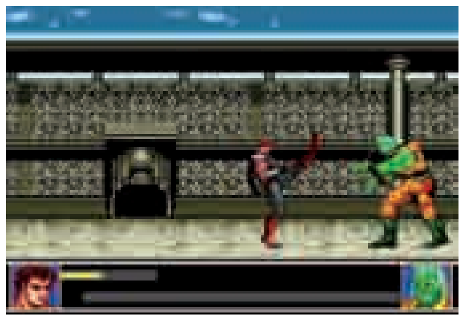


» Here's the game's action-packed intro. To print the whole story we would need to add another 40 pages to the magazine.

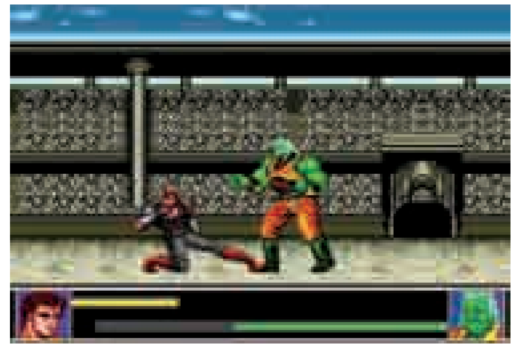


» A great example of *Last Battle*'s conversations, which make absolutely no sense whatsoever.


» This is how you topple this guy: continually step on his toe.


» When you kill this guy he bubbles up and explodes, spraying yellow sprite everywhere – just like in the movie.

POINTLESS PART



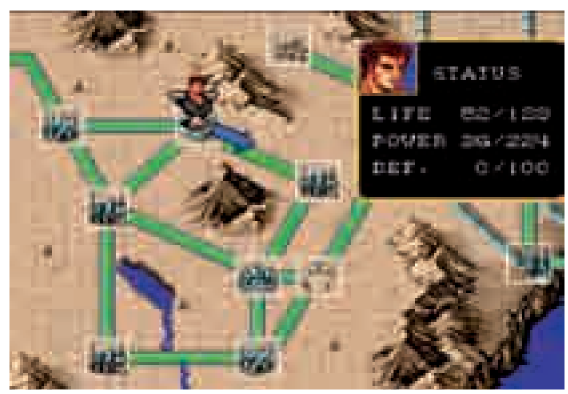
Okay, while *Last Battle* teems with pointless sections, this one has to rank top of the pile. It's the first boss battle you face and involves fighting this big green giant (who we don't ever recall being in the movie, but never mind) in a bland colosseum. His reach is better than yours, so using fists is out of the question. Kicks to the head are, too. The best way to topple this pile of sprouts is to use the sweep attack. However, you will probably feel guilty for adopting this technique, imagine if you were one of those grey sprites that paid money to watch a fight and simply saw a half-naked biker kick a giant in the shins for three minutes.

walking from one side of the screen to the other, they each have stuffy protagonists with special abilities, and both feature mundane backdrops based on bricks and sand.

Working your way across a game map, all the levels seem to slot quaintly into two categories. The first will see your protagonist, Aarzak, fight off a gang of sack-wearing jerks for the inane task of having a character shout a pointless sentence at you, such as: "You have the look of the Hero!" or "Aarzak! Save the world!" The second involves getting hopelessly lost in a cave while being repeatedly shot with arrows. And that's pretty much the whole game.

Aarzak struts through the levels and attacks his enemies by punching, looking like he's trying to kick himself in the head, or looking like he's trying to kick himself in the head while jumping. It's the stuff of videogame nightmares, only made creepier by the equally perplexing Lycra-clad soldiers that run, drop and miraculously rise up from the ground without any explanation or understanding of the laws of physics.

Possibly the laziest band of enemies that have ever been seen in a videogame, the baddies will run towards Aarzak, take one pathetic swipe at him and then frantically run away never to be seen again. They're also only capable of taking one hit before flying backwards so fast off the screen that it looks like they're actually being sucked into an impatient other world, or an extremely late vortex.



» Cool random stats to make the game look all strategy-like. Don't be fooled, though, the only strategy element in *Last Battle* is deciding how to persuade the shop you purchased it from to give you your money back.

[A RANDOM WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER]

AARZAK

You might be asking yourself why the letter 'A' appears twice at the beginning of my name. Well, I recently got the extra one added so my friends can easily find my number in the telephone book. I get sick of hearing that they want to have one-sentence exclamatory conversations with me, and then find them in rough areas of the city standing behind gangs of men that want to kill me. I figured if they could simply call me up my life would be so much more peaceful. Also, I wouldn't have to keep using the royalties I earn from the Mega Play arcade games to purchase plasters.



"IT'S THE STUFF OF VIDEOGAME NIGHTMARES, MADE CREEPIER BY PERPLEXING LYCRA-CLAD SOLDIERS"

JUMP BUG

BIGGER THAN THE BEETLES



- » **PUBLISHER:** ROCK-OLA
- » **RELEASED:** 1981
- » **GENRE:** BOUNCE-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ FOR JAMMA BOARD



HISTORY

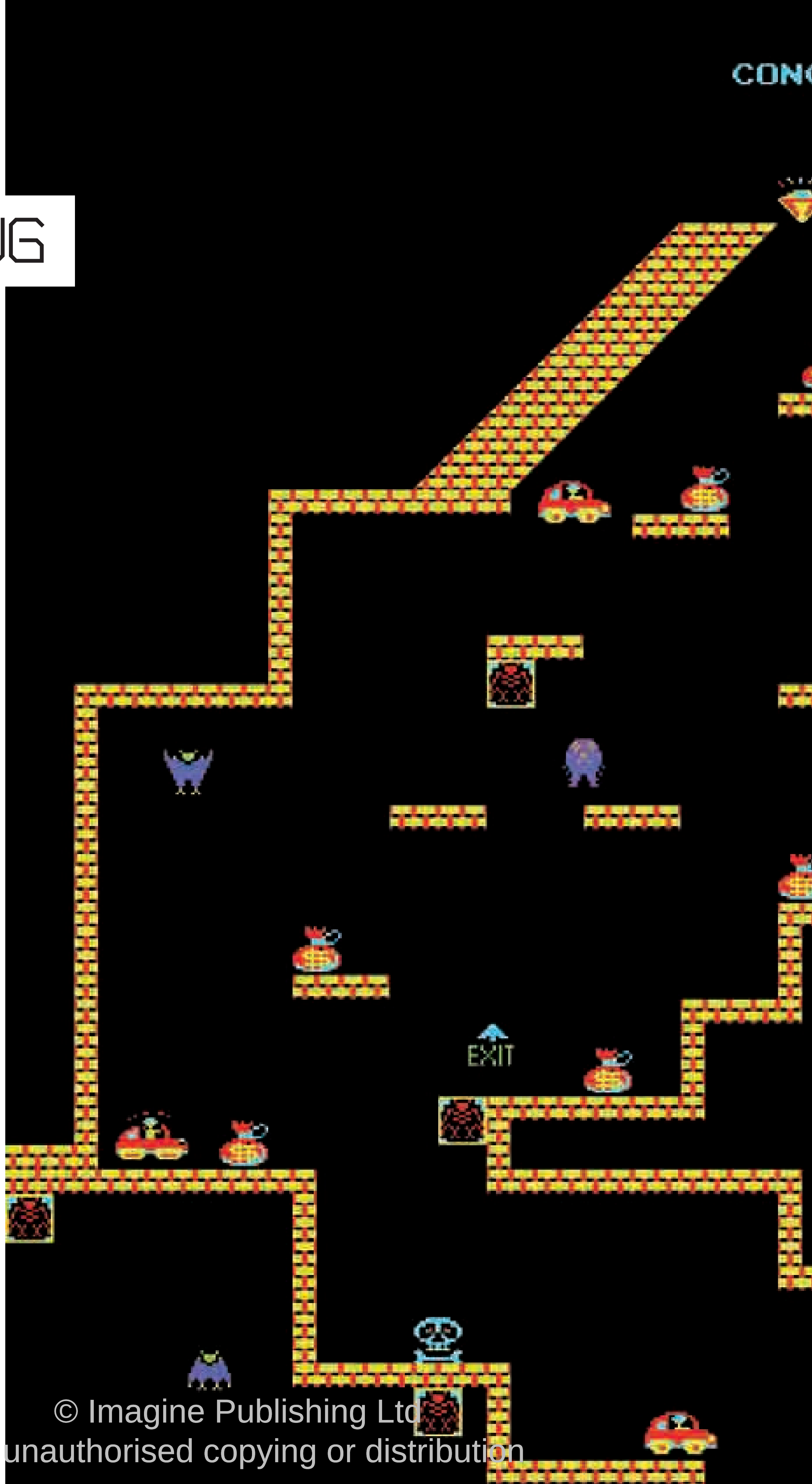
I dream about *Jump Bug*. I'm forever stuck on the underwater level, limbs flailing in slow motion, struggling through an ocean of glue. I wake up with a sticky smile on my face, every time.

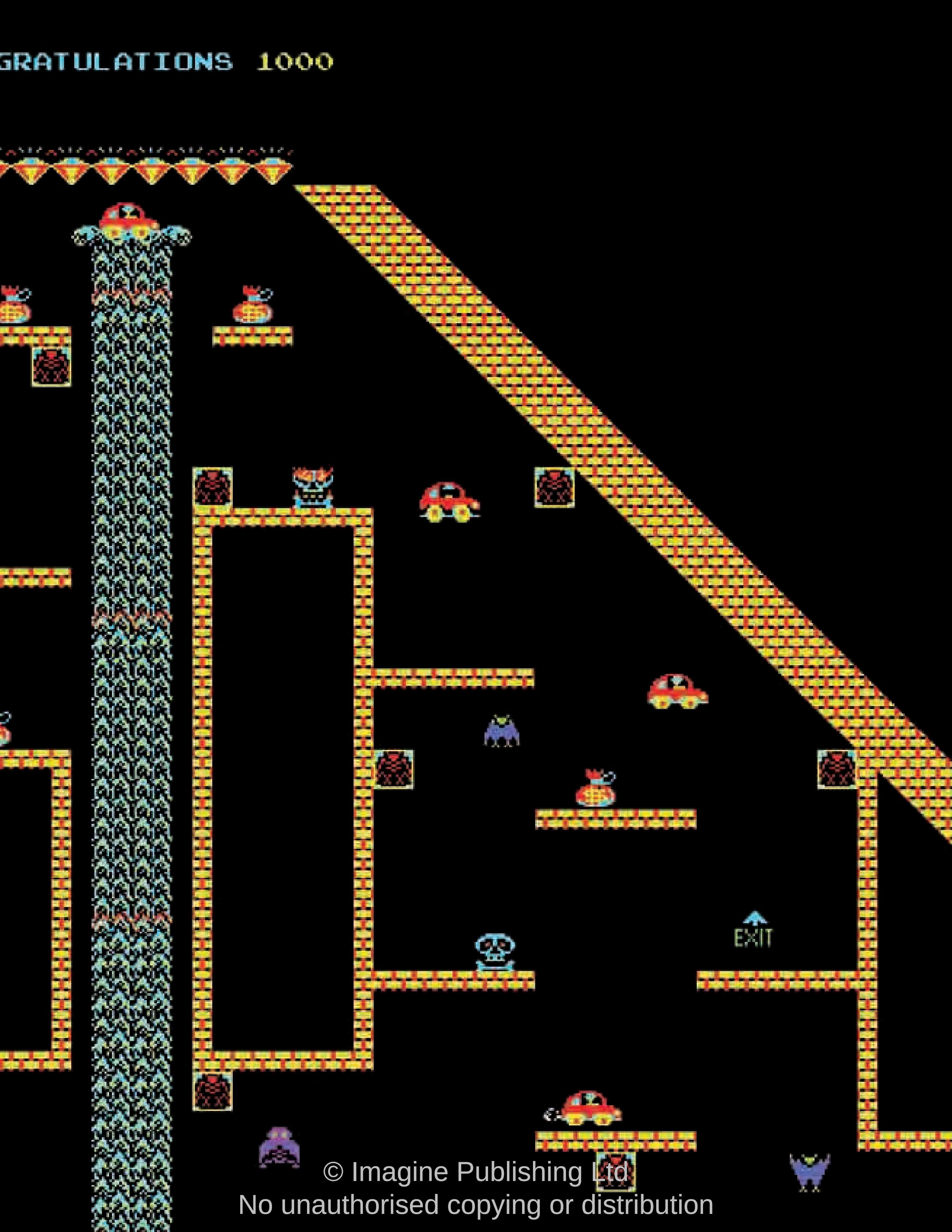
I know 'lost gem' is something of a retro-gaming cliché, but *Jump Bug* – coded in Japan, released in the West by an American jukebox manufacturer and starring a German car – is undoubtedly an oddity. You skip along the rooftops of a city skyline in your VW Beetle, snatching bags of loot on your way. You then find yourself floating on top of clouds, with volcanoes erupting beneath you and gems temptingly scattered among leering enemies. Suddenly, you're entombed in a pyramid, evading enraged bats and arcing ever upwards (in what may be the first scrolling platformer), before catching a ride on a convenient geyser that propels you triumphantly to freedom. That's life-affirming stuff, right there.

The eight stages that comprise the game's strange landscape are populated by an equally diverse bunch of foes. Flying jokers, egg-bombing eagles and grinning submarines (a nod to those other Beatles, perhaps?) can be dispatched with well-timed blasts from your engine – although sometimes, soaring into the sky and gliding high above the madding crowd beneath is just as rewarding.

As you journey from urban high-rises to your goal in the heavens, you fall in with the game's distinctive tempo. It has this wonderful bouncing rhythm to it, with some terrains requiring cautious hops and others demanding giant leaps. Perfecting a tentacle-dodging triple jump through jellyfish-infested waters is a unique challenge, not to be missed.

With no home conversion, no obvious legacy and no appearance on a convenient retro compilation, it is easy to understand why *Jump Bug* has been largely forgotten. However, take the time to enjoy this bumpy ride and you'll be so impressed by the ambition of such an early arcade title, that you'll nod at the wealth of ideas and smile at the quirkiness of it all. And if you fall in love with it like me, maybe you'll even start having the same wet dreams.




GRATULATIONS 1000
EXIT



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

AFTER ESTABLISHING ITSELF AS A MARKET LEADER IN COMPUTER WARGAMES AND STRATEGY TITLES, STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS INC MADE ITS FIRST FORAY INTO THE WORLD OF RPGS IN 1984. IT WAS A PATH THAT WOULD ULTIMATELY BE ITS UNDOING. CRAIG RITCHIE ROLLS A 20 AND YOU KEEP ON READING...

Strategic Simulations Inc

(PART 2 OF 2)

Strategic Simulations Inc, a name synonymous with wargames, had already been in full swing for half a decade. However, the company was just starting to branch out into another area of computer gaming that was growing in popularity thanks to Sir-Tech's *Wizardry* games and Origin's successful *Ultima* series. Fantasy role-playing board games had already been out for years, and home computers were proving a perfect platform for dealing with all the technicalities involved, such as random dice rolls and the basic, yet at times, tedious mathematics involved in calculating damage modifiers, armour class penalties and so on. The release of *Questron*, SSI's first fantasy-themed RPG, would, therefore, prove most rewarding in the long run. The task of simply getting the title out to the public, however, was no easy undertaking.

"I hadn't played *Ultima*," says Joel, "and what I didn't know is that the Dougherty brothers had shopped *Questron* around before they came to SSI. People had told them it was too much like *Ultima*, but because I didn't know it, I just saw this game and it looked cool, and so we signed it up." Joel continues, "Then, the Origin people came up to us at the 1984 CES and said, 'Hey, we already talked to these guys and it's a rip-off of our game.' Of course, we had no idea. I actually ended up with a scar on my hand that I can blame on the Dougherty brothers! I was going up to Tahoe to negotiate with the *Ultima*



Pool of Radiance (NES). Aarggh, it's coming right at us. Kill it!

people to pay them a royalty to let us sell the game. We were committed to the project, and it was too late to pull out. Louis Saekow had already done the box art, the game was a couple of weeks from release and everything was ready to ship. The two brothers were adamant that they hadn't ripped off *Ultima*, claiming that Origin didn't have a right to the stuff because they hadn't taken their code."

Joel found himself dealing with a difficult situation, and knew that he had to make a deal with Origin to get the game out. "I remember hating the whole process and thinking the brothers were a pain," he laughs. "We ended up giving Origin a percentage, after a long meeting. I was late by two hours and while driving I got stuck in a blizzard. I had to put my snow chains on, but because it had been a while [since I last put them on], I ended up putting the chains on my wheels all wrong and gave myself a nasty cut on my hand. I was all pissed because the Dougherty brothers had really cost me. But it all turned out to be worth it; because of *Questron* we got *Phantasie* and then *Wizard's Crown*, which later formed the basis of our *Dungeons & Dragons* combat engine."

As Joel explains, the hardship and having *literally* put blood and sweat into getting *Questron* released was a major stepping stone for his company. The popularity of the title prompted other developers to approach SSI in the hope of having their RPGs published. Spurred on by good sales, from titles such as *Phantasie* and *Gemstone Warrior*, SSI set to work on its own in-house RPG, *Wizard's Crown*.

Designed and programmed by SSI's Paul Murray and Keith Brors, and with the project managed by talented developers Chuck Kroegel and Jeff Johnson, *Wizard's Crown* took the role-playing genre a step forward with its innovative and in-depth tactical combat. Absolutely integral to this was the game's AI, as Paul Murray explains: "Doing the AI so it would fight with reasonable tactics was new. It was the first game I did where the monsters worked in concert. The program would choose a target based on priorities, then try to figure the best way to attack that target. This was the method I used for almost all my AI… just a list of priorities that created the effect of playing reasonably smart."

Although the level of tactical play, made possible by Keith and Paul's programming, ensured that *Wizard's Crown* was a success in its own right, the true value of this innovative RPG would be revealed two years later when it impressed the key decision makers at Tactical Studies Rules – better known as TSR.

In early 1987, Joel got word from a member of his sales team that TSR would soon be awarding a licence for its popular board game series, *Dungeons & Dragons*. And so it was that a group from SSI – comprising Joel, Keith and Chuck, as well as Victor Penman and Randy Berrett – travelled to TSR's headquarters to make its pitch. "The night before we gave our presentation, Keith, who is a great storyteller, ran a little *Dungeons & Dragons* game. I had only played *D&D* once in high school and I hated it. A kid killed me off and I remember not having much fun at all! But Keith is a great Dungeon Master and I really enjoyed it – he showed me what it was like if you had a good DM. So all five of us played the game and got psyched up for the meeting the next day!"

Beyond just getting into character (so to speak) for the meeting, the boys from SSI had a major strategy in place for their pitch. Aware that it was only one of a handful of computer RPG publishers who were vying for the licence (including big dogs, such as Origin and Electronic Arts), SSI put together a presentation that would end up far outclassing the competition. "We basically just blew them away with our presentation," says Joel. "While the other companies had gone to TSR and said that they were going to make one role-playing game and maybe a sequel,

SSI INSTANT EXPERT



SSI paid a high-school kid named Roland Gustafsson for the use of his RDOS, a faster and more secure operating system for the Apple II. Joel reckons Roland bought himself a flashy sports car with all the royalties.

Because of SSI's generous royalty schemes, Gary Grigsby's yearly income at times far surpassed that of Joel, who was president of the company.

Despite operating through numerous generations of videogame hardware, SSI published less than 15 console titles in all.

Pony Canyon's disappointing conversion of *Heroes Of The Lance* is regarded as one of the worst NES games of all time.

During a late drive up to Tahoe after a meeting to avoid a lawsuit with Origin, Joel found himself caught in a blizzard. He still has a scar on his right hand to remind him of that day (see main article for details).

Before acquiring the licence from TSR, Joel had only played *Dungeons & Dragons* twice in his life – and one of those occasions was the night before meeting with the TSR board of directors.

Pool Of Radiance was SSI's most successful *D&D* title, selling more than 264,000 copies on seven platforms.

The original *Stronghold*, released by SSI in 1993, was not only the first *D&D* real-time strategy game, but also the first ever RTS to use a 3D environment.

***Panzer General*,** SSI's biggest-selling game, sold over 250,000 copies at full price when it first came out, and many more in the following years.

***Pool Of Radiance*:** *Ruins Of Myth Drannor*, released in October 2001, was the final title to bear the SSI logo, and as such saw the last box art that Louis Saekow would design for the company.

"THE RELEASE OF QUESTRON PROVED REWARDING IN THE LONG RUN. BUT THE TASK OF GETTING QUESTRON OUT TO THE PUBLIC WASN'T EASY"

WHAT WE'RE MAKING NOW



World At War: A War Divided is a must for any serious fans of the genre.

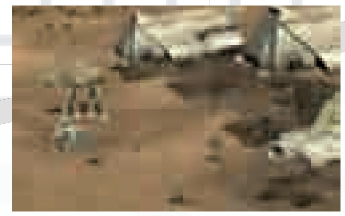


2by3 Games

Founded by Joel Billings, Gary Grigsby and Keith Brors in 2001, you certainly couldn't find more of a spiritual successor to SSI than 2by3 Games. Still at work producing true wargaming titles, the trio have developed the epic *World At War: A World Divided*, which is possibly the most detailed wargame ever. Releasing its titles through Matrix Games, who it considers to be "the one good wargame publisher left out there", 2by3 Games is close to completing its next title – Gary Grigsby's *War Between The States*.



The immensely popular *Empire At War* is set between *Revenge Of The Sith* and *A New Hope*.



Petroglyph Games

Spearheaded by former SSI frontman Chuck Kroegel, Petroglyph is the development house behind the successful *Star Wars* RTS *Empire At War* and its expansion, *Forces Of Corruption*. The company has the distinction of being made up of many of the original members of Westwood Associates, and its talent and experience at creating innovative RTS titles (including such games as *Dune II* and *Command & Conquer*) are clearly evident on its latest outing, *Universe At War: Earth Assault*, due out in November 2007.

we got together with our partners in England, US Gold, who would develop an action/arcade-style game, while we would do the role-playing games." Joel continues, "On top of that, we also had plans to do a Dungeon Master assistant product, so all in all we had three product categories that we would all be working on. So, because everyone at EA or Origin had only pitched one game, there was just no competition. We told TSR, 'We're not just going to do one game; we'll do a whole series! You will get a ton of products out there!' We also showed them how Paul and Keith were hardcore role-playing game fans – that they were the hardcore gamers that knew what TSR was all about. They were impressed by that, you know, by the fact that we were real gamers and not just another computer company."

Duly impressed, TSR contacted SSI a month later and awarded it with a five-year exclusive licence, with the option of a two-year extension. Joel and his team wasted no time in getting the first *Dungeons & Dragons* titles underway. Back in California, Louis Saekow, in charge of all of SSI's artwork and graphic design, got to work creating the box art for the first title in the RPG series. Louis decided to give its first *D&D* game's box a golden border around the illustration, and in doing so, he had unknowingly created the symbolic icon that would define the series from then on: the Gold Box.

At the same time, SSI was well aware of the global rise in console gaming, and set out to develop a number of titles to compete in the burgeoning market. "Another thing we did right away was go to Japan, where we signed up Pony Canyon to do Nintendo versions, which unfortunately, didn't turn out too well," says Joel. "Had we got somebody who was a higher-level company with better programmers, we would have got more out of that deal. We were farming out pieces of the licence, and this is how we missed the whole boat on the Nintendo market."

Although Pony Canyon was slow in getting its *D&D* products out, it had at least given SSI a much needed cash boost. "We basically got money from US Gold and Pony Canyon to help fund the *Gold Box Pool Of Radiance*," says Joel, "and it gave us the money we needed to give to TSR, as advances."

Chuck Kroegel, who was executive producer on many of the Gold Box titles, recalls TSR's strict approach to ensuring that the potential of its licence was maximised:

"They kept tabs on us pretty closely while we were pulling together the team for *Pool Of Radiance*. I was the main liaison with TSR, and I remember that they were very involved in the whole process and demanded a lot from the games. TSR needed total approval on everything, so of course I spent a lot of time interfacing with them."

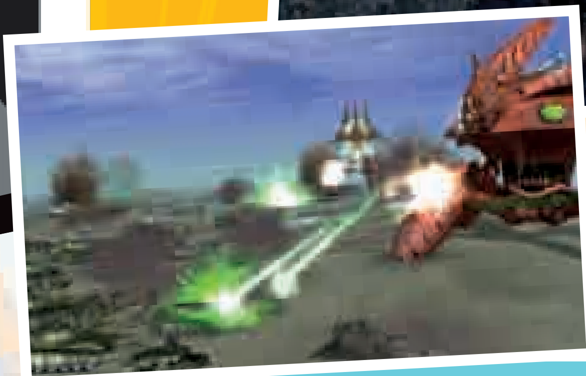
With so much pressure from its licensor, Chuck came up with a sure-fire strategy to prevent any last-minute catastrophes. By ensuring a close relationship with TSR through the entire development process, SSI could guarantee that there would be no surprises when it presented the final product. "We decided to include them every step of the way so they would then 'grow into' the product," says Chuck. "That's how we handled it. Jim Ward, who was head of TSR's product development, was very involved. TSR had its experts working on the *Forgotten Realms* and we had to make sure that our graphics and storyline fitted in perfectly. We worked with them to plan out that the computer game would be in a specific area, and in turn they would plan that their scenarios and books would be in other areas, so that all the products, be it board games, computer games or novels, would fit together. TSR really ruled with an iron fist in those days."

"TSR were fanatical about having everything accurate on *D&D*," agrees Paul Murray, who was also working as a programmer on many Gold Box games, including *Pool Of Radiance*. "I was a *D&D* player from when it was the boxed set, but had recently switched to later-generation games. Keith Brors created a script language that allowed us to create the scenarios, which is what I remember doing." As one of SSI's RPG stalwarts, Paul found himself charged with the enviable task of creating the encounters in the game. "I really loved *Pool Of Radiance*!" he adds. "Later I thought *Dragonlance* was a bit weird,



Chuck Kroegel (middle) still doing what he loves: enjoying a game of table-top warfare.





Universe At War due out in November 2007. The council flats were the first to go.

Arguably the most balanced and distinct faction since *StarCraft*.



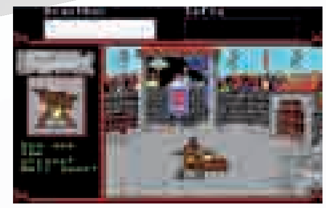
Peter Turcan's rendition of *Waterloo* was a great simulation of the single most famous battle in history.

D&D FACTOR



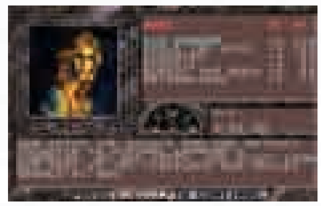
Pool Of Radiance

The first Gold Box title tells the story of a party of lowly adventurers in the city of Phlan who uncover (and then thwart!) a great evil in TSR's *Forgotten Realms* setting. *Pool Of Radiance* set the bar for a number of popular sequels with its combination of excellent writing, tactical combat and SSI's use of the *D&D* licence's full potential.



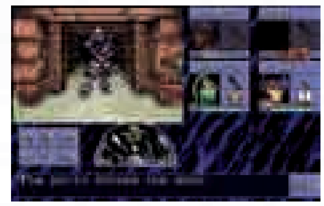
Hillsfar

Westwood Associates' first *Dungeons & Dragons* title, *Hillsfar*, ultimately added up to a collection of mini-games and was a radical departure from the standard Gold Box adventures that SSI was best known for. Its good variety, however, coupled with sufficient RPG elements, saw this title reach bestselling figures across a spread of platforms.



The Dark Queen Of Krynn

Wrapping up the Gold Box trilogy, *Dark Queen Of Krynn* was a challenging adventure tailored for high-level characters. Tons of spells, powerful weapons and the usual fare of magical items were at the party's disposal as they embarked on a quest that would ultimately pit them against the evil goddess Takhisis, the queen of darkness herself.



Eye Of The Beholder

Sporting excellent graphics, a complex interactive environment packed with puzzles and topped off with a great real-time combat system, this Westwood Associates-produced title was another hit for SSI. The first in a successful trilogy, *Eye Of The Beholder* was released on numerous platforms and went on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies.



Warriors Of The Eternal Sun

With a decent story and a vast area to explore, Mega Drive owners loved *Warriors Of The Eternal Sun* when it was released in 1992. Although it could be slow at times, due to the characters having to traverse long distances, it offered enough core *D&D* goodness to keep players hooked. Ultimately, though, it would be overshadowed by the *Phantasy Star* series.



Unlimited Adventures

A full-featured construction kit, *Unlimited Adventures* offered all the tools that budding Dungeon Masters needed to create their own Gold Box-style adventures. Its fan base has released a number of excellent games over the years, including adaptations of TSR's official table-top campaigns, remakes of the old SSI titles and quests worthy of the Gold Box name.

with those exploding lizards, but I still enjoyed the game."

Chuck, likewise, has fond memories of SSI's first Gold Box title. "I played *Pool Of Radiance* a lot. I mean, I played every one of the Gold Box games, but as time went on I didn't play them all to completion because I had a bigger role in the production side of things. *Pool Of Radiance* was the one we put a lot of effort into, and there's something special about it. I think that the rest of them all had their own thing: some were story driven, some brutal to play, but *Pool Of Radiance* was the one that kicked it all off and had a pretty good balance between all its various elements." So, in 1988, after a year in development, lengthy negotiations with TSR, and some of its most enjoyable playtesting sessions to date, SSI launched the first of what would be an epic series, spanning more than a dozen titles, over the next five years.

Integral to SSI's success with the *D&D* licence was its relationship with talented independent developers Westwood Associates. After developing the entertaining title *Hillsfar*, Westwood – a company well known for games such as *Mines Of Titan* and the *Battletech* series – started working on an ambitious project that would build upon the success of FTL Games' *Dungeon Master*. "To some degree, *Eye Of The Beholder* became *Dungeon Master* on the PC," says Chuck. "We decided to let Westwood run with it, by letting Brett Sperry's vision of the game work itself out. Westwood did the first two and SSI did the third one internally." *The Eye Of The Beholder* series was another great success, its rave reviews and excellent sales further adding to SSI's popularity in the early Nineties.

DICE AND RICE!

Although SSI's brand was now arguably more recognisable as an RPG publisher, it had not abandoned its strategy gaming roots. Gary Grigsby was still putting together excellent titles, and the occasional outside developer found success with games such as *Waterloo* by Peter Turcan, and *Red Lightning* and the *Conflict* series by Norm Koger. The idea for its greatest wargame success would come not from traditional table-top influences, however, but from the unlikely inspiration of a Japanese Sega Genesis-title called *Daisen Raiku*.

"I can honestly say that if we hadn't played *Daisen Raiku*, *Panzer General* would never have happened, period," says Chuck, who was the game's scenario designer. "*Panzer General* was diametrically opposed to the Gary Grigsby type of game that SSI was used to making. At first, Joel said, 'Wow,

"THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER SERIES' RAVE REVIEWS AND EXCELLENT SALES ADDED TO SSI'S POPULARITY IN THE EARLY NINETIES"

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK





Sega's 16-bit adaptation of the Gold Box combat engine just didn't feel the same.

They say that there is often a resemblance between pets and their owners.

what is this thing, don't you care about scale?' and so on. Also, a lot of games had unit stacking and other things that would add to the complexity. *Daisen* and *Panzer General* said you can only have one unit per location and it's perfectly fine."

Despite Joel's initial reluctance, the project got the go ahead. In 1994, the game was released, and SSI's gamble more than paid off – in fact, *Panzer General* went on to be its most successful title ever.

"The whole thing was more accessible to the average game player," explains Chuck. "And even for the hardcore gamers, they could comprehend and understand its tactics and so forth. Most of all, though, we achieved a certain sense of persistency by allowing the units to improve and be moved from battle to battle. We mixed in a lot of our learning from RPG games into *Panzer*." The success of the game spawned a number of sequels as well as an array of spin-off titles, such as *Star General, Fantasy General* and *Panzer General 3D*. "It's nice to see a lot of people have established websites that have been around for years now," adds Chuck. "People are still doing mods for *Panzer General I, II* and *III*. I feel that other than *Advance Wars*, what we did in *Panzer General* hasn't quite been captured by anyone else."

While *Panzer General* was in development, SSI started on another TSR-licensed RPG called *Dark Sun*. By now, the Gold Box series had already seen 12 titles and was beginning to show signs of age. Eager to step things up with a second generation of RPG titles, SSI felt that the harsh desert world of Athas had all the promise to be another big seller. The development team got to work creating an entirely new engine with new gameplay mechanics and improved graphics. However, it wasn't too long before the project started causing big trouble for the company.

"The *Dark Sun* project killed us," admits Joel. "We thought we could do it in one year, like we had done with *Pool Of Radiance* in 1987-88, but we were wrong. When DS took two years instead of one, things began to get very tough in late 1992 and early 1993, leading us to lay off around 20-25 people in early 1993. *Dark Sun* finally came out in September 1993, but the delay had scared us enough to realise that big projects would now require $1 million or more, and we didn't have the resources to risk another failure." Joel continues, "My uncle was the guarantor on our bank loans, so it wasn't fair to risk things. We needed to either raise money and thus lose family control (at that point EA owned 20 per cent, my extended family owned 55 per cent, and employees and ex-employees owned the rest), or sell the company and become part of a bigger company that could invest in those expensive projects."

Joel eventually opted for the latter, and just before *Panzer General* was released, SSI was sold to Mindscape. It was early 1994, and SSI had just taken its first steps into the world of corporate reshuffles. Just as gaming legends, Origin, Sierra and Broderbund before it, SSI would soon be swallowed up by the corporate giants that were devouring the very industry it had helped to create.

Fast-forward to 1998, and Mindscape had been sold to The Learning Company, by which time Joel had long retired as president. In turn, The Learning Company was acquired by Mattell in

SSI TIMELINE 1986-2001

1986 TEENAGER ROLAND GUSTAFSSON DEVELOPS HIS OWN APPLE II OPERATING SYSTEM, WHICH HE WOULD GO ON TO LICENSE TO SSI, MAKING A LOT MORE MONEY THAN HIS FRIENDS WORKING AT MCDONALD'S.

1987 COMMODORE LAUNCHES THE AMIGA 500. SSI PROGRAMMERS GROAN AT HAVING TO MASTER YET ANOTHER MACHINE'S INTRICACIES.

JOEL PLAYS ONLY HIS SECOND EVER GAME OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, THE NIGHT BEFORE MEETING WITH THE BOARD AT TSR.

AFTER BEING WOWED BY ITS PRESENTATION, TSR AWARDS SSI A FIVE-YEAR EXCLUSIVE LICENCE TO DEVELOP ALL D&D SOFTWARE.

1988 20% OF THE COMPANY IS SOLD TO EA, WITH PART OF THE DEAL BEING THAT EA WOULD HAVE EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTION RIGHTS FOR ALL SSI TITLES SOLD IN THE USA.

SSI RELEASES POOL OF RADIANCE IN AUGUST, AND STARTS THE GOLD BOX BALL ROLLING.

1989 GARY GRIGSBY GETS TO WORK ON SECOND FRONT, HIS FIRST GAME DEVELOPED FOR THE PC.

CURSE OF THE AZURE BONDS, SSI'S FIRST D&D SEQUEL, IS RELEASED. NUMEROUS TWEAKS AND IMPROVEMENTS OVER THE ORIGINAL MAKE THIS A WINNER AMONG FANS.

YEAR END SALES REACH ALMOST 7.5 MILLION DOLLARS, SSI'S HIGHEST TOTAL TO DATE.

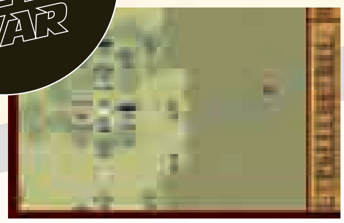
1990 DRAGONSTRIKE, THE WORLD'S FIRST 3D DRAGON-FLYING SIMULATOR, HITS THE SHELVES.

1991 SSI PUBLISHES EYE OF THE BEHOLDER, DEVELOPED BY WESTWOOD ASSOCIATES. IT FLIES OFF THE SHELVES AS FAST AS SSI CAN PRODUCE NEW COPIES.

THE ORIGINAL NEVERWINTER NIGHTS IS LAUNCHED ON AOL, AT $6 PER HOUR. PHONE BILLS SKYROCKET AS PEOPLE LOSE THEMSELVES IN THE FIRST GRAPHICAL MMORPG.

BUCK ROGERS: COUNTDOWN TO DOOMSDAY IS RELEASED, MARKING SSI'S VERY FIRST GAME ON SEGA'S 16-BIT HARDWARE.

THIS TIME IT'S WAR



Panzer General

The greatest-selling true wargame of all time, *Panzer General* is also one of the most praised titles ever released on any platform. Innovative, flashy, well scripted and thoroughly researched, this World War II game breathed new life into a slowly dying genre when it hit (and flew off) the shelves in 1994.



Kampfgruppe

Another masterpiece from Gary Grigsby, *Kampfgruppe* offered gamers an accurate tactical experience of the German battles on the Russian Front in the period between 1941 and 1945. As the first SSI wargaming title to factor in line of sight, it was immensely popular and won a 1985 Game of the Year award.



War Of The Lance

War Of The Lance combined RPG elements with genuine strategy by not only having a wargaming component, but also allowing players to send familiar *Dragonlance* heroes on side-quests that could earn special items, granting bonuses to their armies. Anyone care to program us a modern remake?



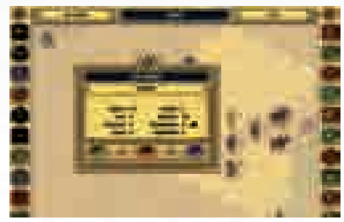
Steel Panthers

This WWII tactical sim sold over 130,000 copies and spawned a number of sequels. Detailed campaigns, a huge selection of units and Gary Grigsby's trademark historical accuracy made this a winner. Visit Matrix Games online for a free updated version with tons of new scenarios, improved graphics and a great map editor.



Gary Grigsby's War In Russia

With historically accurate German and Russian campaigns, superb detail at every level of the game and a staggering degree of control over all facets of players' armies, *War In Russia* is regarded by some as Grigsby's finest SSI outing. An improved version with tweaks and bug-fixes is also available for download from Matrix Games.



Fantasy General

Making use of the *Panzer General* engine, *Fantasy General* offered a halfway point for wargamers who felt like commanding dragons instead of tanks. A variety of scenarios, a wide array of troops and a finely tuned experience system all added to the appeal. Historical accuracy? No. True, hardcore wargaming in a fantasy setting? Yes.

> "WHEN A MANAGEMENT TEAM IS FOCUSED MORE ON SALES AND MARKETING THAN HAVING A PASSION FOR GAMING, THINGS FALL APART"

1999. Still working as vice president in charge of games for Mindscape, Joel eventually left the company in January 2000, and was followed soon after by Chuck. When it was revealed that The Learning Company was, in fact, not making any money at all, Mattell's new CEO decided to get rid of the games division entirely. "Ubisoft was handed the entire gaming portfolio, either for free, or it may have been paid to take TLC off their books," recalls Louis Saekow. "Mattell's books were making huge losses from gaming, but this had nothing to do with SSI. In fact, SSI was always sitting with revenues around 15 or 18 million dollars, which was really good for a wargame company, but wasn't the sexy numbers that Ubisoft was after. Ubisoft ran its focus more towards videogames and big-seller games, and that's why Joel started 2by3 – because he wanted to keep supporting his love of wargames."

One of the greatest lessons that we can take from the SSI story is that when the driving force behind games development is a management team focused more on sales and marketing than actually having a passion for gaming, things will inevitably fall apart. "There's always something exciting about working with truly passionate people," adds Louis, who was with SSI from beginning to end. "Joel didn't start SSI because he wanted money. He would have gone to a Chicago business school if SSI failed. If someone has the passion from the heart to do something, it really is different. It's clear when something is borne out of love for the product rather than love for the money."

And the passion remains in many of the key figures behind SSI's long list of classics. Joel, Keith and Gary are still working together, and Chuck is now head of Petroglyph, making games alongside many of the same people he worked with at Westwood Associates. They are still doing what they love; still producing games with the same passion they showed over 20 years ago. As Joel Billings says, "I was 21, one month out of college and about to go to business school to get an MBA. I started SSI during my summer job and decided to postpone business school for a year, then two. I never made it to business school. We're still working on wargames – it's what we do."

1992 SSI RELEASES LEGEND OF DARKMOON, THE SEQUEL TO EYE OF THE BEHOLDER, WHICH WOULD GO ON TO BE HAILED BY FANS AS THE PINNACLE OF THE SERIES.

1993 THE COMPANY EXPERIENCES FINANCIAL TROUBLES THAT LEAD TO A LAY-OFF OF OVER 20 EMPLOYEES.

TONY LA RUSSA BASEBALL IS CONVERTED TO THE GENESIS, AND BECOMES ONE OF THE BESTSELLING BASEBALL TITLES OF THE ERA.

1994 SSI'S LICENSING DEAL TO CREATE D&D PRODUCTS EXPIRES.

PANZER GENERAL SINGLE-HANDEDLY REVIVES THE WARGAMING GENRE, AND GOES ON TO SELL OVER A QUARTER OF A MILLION COPIES – AN ABSOLUTELY STAGGERING FIGURE FOR A WARGAME.

1995 STEEL PANTHERS IS RELEASED TO RAVE REVIEWS, AND BUILDS UP A FAN BASE THAT IS STILL MODDING THE GAME TODAY.

AT THE END OF THE YEAR, JOEL BECOMES VICE PRESIDENT IN CHARGE OF ALL OF MINDSCAPE'S GAMES (INCLUDING SSI'S) AND CHUCK REPLACES HIM AS PRESIDENT OF SSI.

1996 THE COMPANY BEGINS TO SHOW SIGNS OF HAVING MORE FINANCIAL TROUBLES.

1997 AOL'S NEVERWINTER NIGHTS SHUTS DOWN AFTER A SUCCESSFUL SIX-YEAR RUN.

1998 SSI'S OFFICE LEASE EXPIRES AND THE BASE OF OPERATIONS MOVES TO MINDSCAPE'S HQ IN NOVATO (ABOUT 60 MILES FROM SAN FRANCISCO).

THE LEARNING COMPANY ACQUIRES MINDSCAPE, AND SSI WITH IT.

LOUIS SAEKOW RETIRES FROM ACTIVELY RUNNING HIS COMPANY, LOUIS SAEKOW DESIGN.

1999 MATTEL BUYS THE COMPANY.

2000 JOEL BILLINGS AND CHUCK KROEGEL LEAVE SSI.

2001 UBISOFT ACQUIRES SSI IN THE FINAL OF ITS ILL-FATED CORPORATE SHUFFLES.

POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR IS RELEASED BY UBISOFT, AFTER WHICH THE SSI NAME IS PUT TO REST.

THE MAKING OF...

SENSIBLE SOCCER



As one of the most fondly remembered Amiga titles, Sensible Soccer made the beautiful game shine on home computers with precise, flowing gameplay, iconic aesthetics and a real sense of fun. The game's creator, Jon Hare, chats to Craig Grannell about his landmark title, and no one even says, 'It's a funny old game'…





» *Sensi*'s grand daddy, *Tehkan World Cup*: responsible for both joy (it's fun!) and pain (because of the notorious trackball control method).

"WHILE WE WERE DOING A LOT OF LATE NIGHT SESSIONS ON MEGA LO MANIA, WE STARTED THINKING ABOUT DOING A FOOTBALL GAME. THE VERY FIRST SENSIBLE SOCCER MEN WERE THE MEGA LO MANIA GUYS DRESSED IN FOOTBALL KITS"

Sensible Software's infatuation with digital soccer can be traced back a few years before its breakthrough Amiga title *Sensible Soccer* ('*Sensi*' hereafter) arrived. In the Eighties, Jon Hare and Chris Yates became addicted to trackball-operated *Tehkan World Cup* ("A game that *hurt* if you wore a ring on your hand," according to Jon), which directly influenced C64 hit *Microprose Soccer*, lauded at the time as "the best football game ever produced" by *C&VG*.

Fast-forward a few years and the Sensible Software team was hard at work on *Mega Lo Mania*, squeezing in umpteen games of *Kick Off 2* during coffee breaks. "We were getting irritated with some bugs in the game, and there were problems with it we didn't like, although that was only because we'd played it a hell of a lot," begins Jon. "While doing a lot of late night sessions on *Mega Lo Mania*, we started thinking about creating a football game. The very first *Sensible Soccer* men were the *Mega Lo Mania* guys dressed in football kits. By the time *Mega Lo Mania* was done, I'd mocked up a pitch, and we had a perspective and look to go on. Chris Chapman then knocked up some controls and we got going with it."

Jon admits that some aspects of *Sensi* were inspired by other games, "There's the overhead view from *Mega Lo Mania*, and the pace of the game probably came from *Kick Off*, which is quite fast." However, the key element of the game is how it feels to play, and this is reliant on two components: the controls and the player selection. "If you look at the controls of *Sensi*, they're pretty bloody simple," says Jon, adding that it enables gamers to get stuck in straight away. "You move a guy around with the ball, and you can pass it with a tap of the button, or hold the button down to kick it in the air. So there's some innovation with the short or long press, but your bloke basically kicks it in the direction he's facing."

Where *Sensi* really comes into its own, Jon argues, is in the way the players are selected, "That, for me, is the game's biggest innovation, and it's the most invisible part of the game." According to Jon, the game always tries to key players up to be the next player on the ball, and it reads from the direction you're pressing on the joystick which player you're drawing on. "In other words, it tries to interpret from the direction you're running which player you want to run on to the ball," clarifies Jon. "This is the most innovative and complicated part of *Sensi*, and it's the best bit, too."



» Sensible Software's forerunner to *Sensi*, *Microprose Soccer*, would be just like the Amiga game – if the players doubled their weight and couldn't be bothered to move.



» Red card? The referee's a w… (onderful person, who works hard, and has a tough time out there on the pitch – Ed).

FOOTBALL ICONS

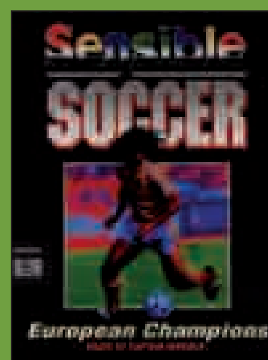
Strangely, it's partly down to *Sensi*'s somewhat basic aesthetic that the controls work so well. "The fact that our animation is extremely simple means the player's imagination has to fill in the holes, but it enabled us to create very responsive controls; everything runs on the frame," explains Jon. For him, many subsequent titles that don't do this are problematic, "For example, *FIFA* went backwards because it was too slow, not running on the frame." Although some modern-day critics suggest that *Sensi* suffers in terms of realism because of its simple graphics (see Keeping It Real boxout, for more of Jon's thoughts on this subject), Jon argues that *Sensi* should be thought of in a more iconic fashion.

"The players in *Sensi* are like the pieces in *Monopoly*, they are icons, and they are representative of a player. But *Sensi* does have 'realism' in the areas where it matters – in terms of data." This is certainly true, *Sensi*'s attention to detail is staggering (and even more so for its immediate sequels). "There are thousands of players, all in then-accurate clubs," says Jon. "All the black guys are black, all the white guys are white, all the blonde guys are blonde and so on. That sounds basic, but no one

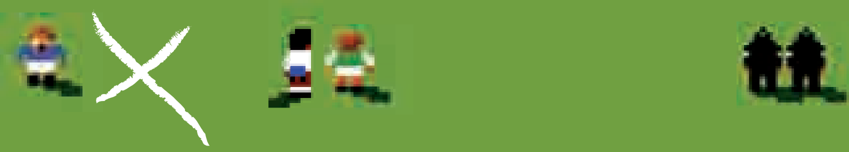
IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** RENEGADE
» **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **GENRE:** SPORTS
» **FORMATS:** AMIGA (LATER CONVERTED TO ATARI ST, IBM PC, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE, SNES, AND OTHERS)
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+



THE MAKING OF… SENSIBLE SOCCER



KEEPING IT REAL

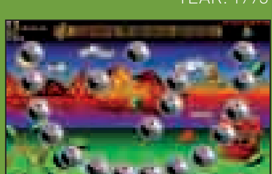
Today, games developers are hellbent on making games 'realistic', although that often amounts to 'television realism'. "People miss the point entirely with realism," says Jon Hare. "The thing to re-create is not what something looks like or sounds like, but the *feeling* – what's going through your mind at the time." For Jon, this highlights cultural differences, "It's a misnomer that realism is about visuals. This is a very American perspective – not what British software used to be about or what Japanese software has ever been about." He believes the best games involve the player in the gameplay – in the experience and the feeling. On *Sensi*, he argues that, "If someone can't lose themselves in a football game with quality graphics like *Sensi*, what that actually tells you is their imagination is impaired. I can lose myself in a game of chess, like it's a battle, and it doesn't even move." He also reckons that if you ask a sportsman what's in their mind when playing, or how much of their 'reality' is visual, they'd say virtually none. "It's all about control and feel. If you speak to Roger Federer about what it takes to win a tennis game, I'm sure he's not even aware of what anything's looking like."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

WIZBALL
SYSTEMS: C64 (CONVERTED TO AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, IBM PC, ZX SPECTRUM)
YEAR: 1987

WIZKID (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ATARI ST, AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

CANNON FODDER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA (CONVERTED TO 3DO, ATARI ST, CD32, GAME BOY COLOR, IBM PC, JAGUAR, MEGA DRIVE, SNES, AND OTHERS)
YEAR: 1993



had coloured the players properly before." Furthermore, Jon adds that the players all play in the correct positions, bringing to the game a kind of 'fan' level of detail.

Sensi's detail resulted in the game identifying with what football fans wanted in a game, but the title's playability meant that even those less interested in the beautiful game were still roped in. Jon was clearly in the football-fan camp, and for him the game almost became the culmination of a lifetime's interest in football. "When I was a young child, I had some plastic nets I'd got from somewhere, and I'd make football matches from any toys that came to hand," he says. "As a kid, I was also a big fan of *Subbuteo*, and I've always been interested in international things like flags, countries, places and things like that."

Others at Sensible Software shared Jon's passion, and this is perhaps what sets *Sensi* apart from its contemporaries and most football games created before or since. "Underlying the game is a huge football culture, and this stems from an understanding of being a lifelong football fan," says Jon. Usefully, publisher Renegade was on the same wavelength, "Renegade was supportive, didn't pressure us too much, and gave us the creative freedom to make the product," says Jon. Because of this, the team continued sculpting the game to perfection, until the last minute. "Every area of the game was tweaked – the speed players ran, the circle in which the ball sticks to their feet, the angle you assist them on to the ball, the length and outcome of tackles, yellow and red cards, goalkeepers – and observed interacting with all of the other elements," explains Jon. "It's a very overused phrase, but this was a very iterative process. Making a good game is about going through controls again and again."

Back in the early-Nineties, Jon notes that there were no milestones, meaning it was possible to focus entirely on what was needed for the game. "It's a much better way of working," says Jon. "And the end result goes to show that when you allow a good, creative team freedom to work, without having to worry about stuff, really good work can be produced. When you constantly have to check 'can we do this?'… well, it's hard to communicate just how much making people constantly check themselves destroys [their] creativity."



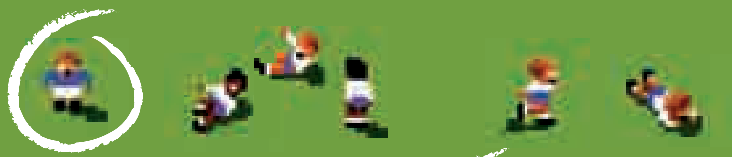
» Little did the goalie know: by holding on to the helium-filled ball, he'd soon be floating over Norway.

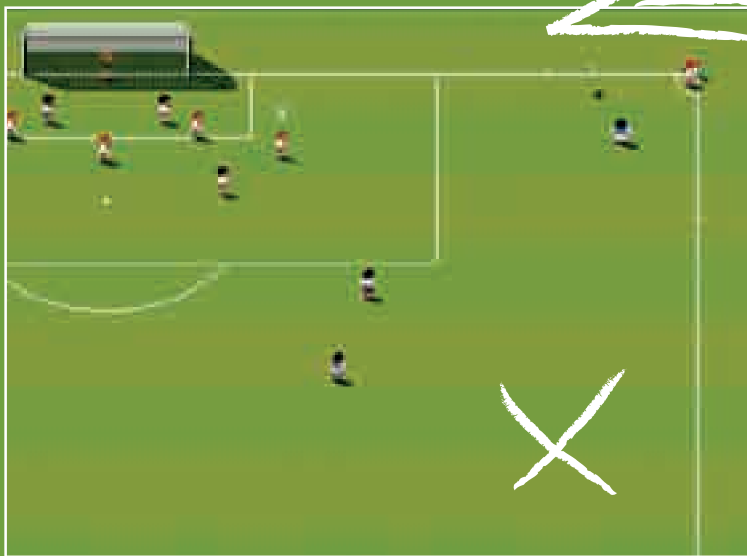
When *Sensi* was released, acclaim was universal. *Amiga Power*'s Stuart Campbell almost ran out of superlatives, concluding Sensi was, "without the merest inkling of a suggestion of a shadow of a doubt, the best football game ever". Elsewhere, an *Amiga Format* 'Gold' and a *CU* 'Screenstar' were just two of the many gongs awarded to the game. For Jon, the praise was welcome, but expected, "It was amazing, but *Sensible Soccer* is the only game I've worked on that I knew was brilliant. It just had 'it'." Jon believes that the game had some 'magic', something that he and developer Chris Chapman strove not to lose during subsequent work on the series. "There were certain areas of the code we wouldn't allow ourselves to ever touch, such as the core control system" he says. "If I asked Chris to change something, he'd say, 'I don't really know how we got to the point where this works, and I don't want to break it apart and re-engineer it,' and so we'd just leave it. Sometimes, the best part of creative work can be like magic, and that's true of games. Something just works and it's perfect, but it's not premeditated or planned – it just happens."



» In the era 'BAL' (Before Annoying Lawyers), football games could use real names for free, without the fear of being beaten to death by a lawsuit.

"SOMETIMES, THE BEST PART OF CREATIVE WORK CAN BE LIKE MAGIC, AND THAT'S TRUE OF GAMES. SOMETHING JUST WORKS AND IT'S JUST PERFECT, BUT IT'S NOT PREMEDITATED OR PLANNED – IT JUST HAPPENS"





» Tarquin waited patiently for the corner kick, unaware that a huge number 3 was hovering menacingly above his head.



» The amazed crowd looked on as two giant footballers stared each other down. Clearly, this would be a match to remember.

A WORLD OF SOCCER

Although the basic engine didn't initially change that much, the scope of the game grew. New releases included up-to-date teams and statistics, and when *Sensible World Of Soccer* arrived, it brought with it management, player trading and more. "I still maintain that *SWOS* is the best player-manager game on the market," says Jon. "I think we wanted to add a 'world' of football to the original *Sensi*, as well, but we just didn't have time. But for *SWOS*, we included every league we could find – 24,000 players, 1,500 teams. We had two full-time guys just researching data for us!"

Jon reckons *SWOS* remains the most 'global' game he's ever played, "I can't think of anything else that so comprehensively acknowledges the rest of the world's existence." And for Jon, this is the thing that he is most proud of, "*Sensi* has become an international game, similar to the *Subbuteo* I played as a child. The fact we bothered to include 80-odd international leagues brought us an immense amount of loyalty."

More recent *Sensi* efforts have fared less well, however. "The problem with 3D versions of *Sensi*, such as *Sensible Soccer '98*, is that it's a very, very fast game, and the animation can't keep up in 3D," says Jon. "As for the recent Codemasters version… well, if there's a problem with it, it's that it wasn't finished properly before it came out. It's not a bad game, but *Sensible Soccer* is almost perfect for what it does, and the only way you get that is by putting the game through the mill at the end, and I don't think we pushed it as far as we could." Still, even such disappointments haven't diminished the appeal of the original, and during the interview, Jon expressed hope for the Xbox Live Arcade version of the game, "The last time I saw it, it looked very good. I'm excited about what this version could do, because it's more traditional *Sensi*."

So, what is it about *Sensi* that keeps people playing it, and has fans clamouring for authentic remakes over a decade after the release of the Amiga original? "It stands up on a lot of fronts," considers Jon. "First, it's still the only place some people will see their country mentioned in any game – certainly as an acknowledged part of the world, with living, breathing football teams and life there, equal to us and every other country. Second, the gameplay holds up: it's still fun – maybe a bit basic… it certainly looks basic – but it invites people in to pick it up quickly and get involved. Third, it was very successful: it was number one in the charts for a long time, and every year that it came back, it topped the charts." Jon also reckons the game stands for certain values, "Not just in gaming, I think it goes beyond gaming. I think *Sensi* stands for a certain era in entertainment when things weren't quite so in-your-face, market-led and stuffed down your throat until you couldn't avoid them." For Jon, and many others, *Sensi* is therefore something of a 'game for the people'. "This all underlines why people still want the game," says Jon. "So many people have told me they nearly blew their degree playing *Sensi*, or that they spent their whole teenage life playing the game. They felt like *Sensi* belonged to them, and that it was a part of them," he concludes.



» "No pressure!" yelled the manager, as Gerald prepared to take the penalty, trying to ignore the giant scoreboard showing his team's slender lead.

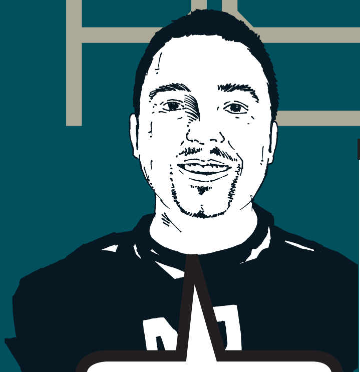
A SENSIBLE ACCOLADE

In March 2007, Henry Lowood, curator of the History of Science and Technology Collections at Stanford University, with academic researcher Matteo Bittanti, games journalist Christopher Grant and game designers Steve Meretzky and Warren Spector, formulated the 'ten most important videogames of all time', presenting the list at the Game Developers Conference. *Sensible World Of Soccer* made the list, alongside such gaming giants as *Tetris*, *Warcraft*, *Doom* and *Civilization*. "That is the biggest accolade I think any of our games has ever received, and it's also the biggest accolade I've ever had professionally," says Jon. "I mean, this is about the ten most important games *of all time*. Also, *Sensi*'s from the only European developer on the list – aside, perhaps, from *Tetris*, which is Russian – and it's the only sports title *and* the most modern game there." Certainly, it makes the *CU* 'Screenstar' seem somewhat insignificant.



» Brian the goalie's team-mates wondered if his heart was still in it. This was the tenth match in a row that he'd spent lying face down in the mud.

RETRORATED



Woohoo, Space Giraffe is finally here, and it's utterly brilliant. Oh, and for all those readers who were upset about the lack of scores for our retro rated section, you'll be pleased to know that they're now back and more detailed than ever.

SPACE GIRAFFE

retro GAMER SIZZLER



INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** LLAMASOFT

» **COST:** 400 POINTS

Let's get one thing out of the way. Despite what you may have heard, *Space Giraffe* is basically just *Tempest*. Granted, it's probably the most ambitious take on the Theurer classic that Minter or anyone else has ever attempted, but it's a copycat nonetheless.

Now for the good news – although the above news is still good if you love *Tempest* like we do – *Space Giraffe* is brilliant. It's the mutt's nuts, the dog's bollocks, the bee's knees (we didn't know a slang name for a bee's dangly bits or if they even have any).

It's refreshing to see Minter stick two fingers up at those publishers and developers who are currently playing it safe on Microsoft's online service. *Space Giraffe* is a title that refuses to conform to the Xbox Live ideal and instead blazes its own pioneering trail. Forget the largely useless tutorial that has been (almost grudgingly) supplied, because *Space Giraffe* is pure old-school and requires you to learn its subtle mechanics and intricate scoring system by 'doing', rather than reading.

The exceedingly gaudy visuals are liable to make your eyes bleed and your head explode, and most players will scream themselves inside out when their giraffe hits yet another well-hidden bullet, but suddenly a light switches on in your brain and everything seamlessly clicks together. You start to lurk in certain locations so that you can bait your enemies. You discover the joys of the surreal bonus stage and hardly begin to notice as the blinding soundtrack subtly burns itself into your brain. You begin to juggle bullets in order to extend the power zone, and appreciate the well-crafted achievements and quickly start to understand the concept of 'bulling' (it's not as rude as it sounds) and it suddenly dawns on you that Jeff Minter is indeed a gaming God.

Space Giraffe has been a very long time coming, we remember playing an early version of it way back in 1980 (Only joking Jeff), but the wait has most definitely been worth it. Free of the sort of arty farty rubbish that you will often find peddled in most full-price releases these days, *Space Giraffe* is nothing more than gaming in its purest form. It's lightning in a bottle, it's mana from heaven. It's just wonderful. So, what are you waiting for? Stick 500 points on your wife's credit card and download it today.



» A moment of (relative) serenity in *Space Giraffe*'s weird and wacky world.

PRESENTATION: 45% Nice and trippy to look at, but the tutorial is largely useless and will make you cry.

AESTHETICS: 90% Initially a mess, but *Space Giraffe*'s beauty soon becomes obvious. And you've just got to love the music.

PLAYABILITY: 92% Takes a while to work out what you're doing, but when it all clicks you'll be in gaming nirvana.

LONGEVITY: 95% The ability to replay levels means you'll constantly want to better your score.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 98% Less than £4 for one of Xbox Live Arcade's best games? Sounds like a bargain to us.

OVERALL 97% Quite simply the best game currently available on Xbox Live Arcade.

GOLDEN AXE

INFORMATION

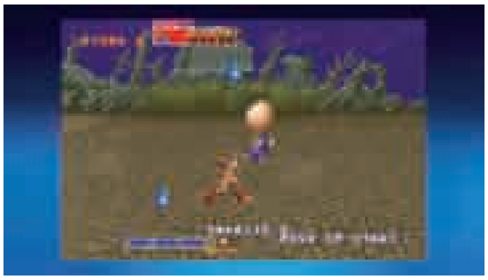
» **DEVELOPER:** SECRET LEVEL
» **COST:** 400 POINTS

At last, someone at Sega has realised that the 360 is capable of replicating perfect renditions of its arcade catalogue and not just bog-standard Mega Drive ports Now don't get us wrong, the Mega Drive is a superb console and has a vast array of great games, but let's face it, if you're going to play an arcade game, you may as well experience it in its original form.

And so we come to *Golden Axe*, an ever-so-crusty scrolling fighter that laughs at political correctness while booting a pixie in the face and nicking his spilled belongings. One of the first games of its kind, *Golden Axe* eschews the traditional urban locations that feature in most scrolling brawlers, and instead takes place in a fantastical world where people live on the backs of turtles and use giant eagles because it's much cheaper than flying by jumbo jet. The troika of heroes may well be lacking in the special moves department, but at least Tyris Flare has had the good sense to show off as much flesh as possible as she hacks and slashes her way towards Death Adder with pals Ax Battler and Gilius Thunderhead in tow.

Along the way, your dynamic trio ride mythical-looking beasts such as fire-breathing dragons, while savagely brutalising the aforementioned pixies will reward your thuggery with potions or food. Everything takes place at a sedate pace – there are rarely more than four enemies on screen at any one time – but the fantastical setting and the ability to unleash huge magic attacks does help to make up for *Golden Axe*'s obvious shortcomings. You'll quickly obtain all 200 Achievement Points, and only the craziest of gamers will play with the horribly smoothed-over graphics switched on, but at least you'll be having fun, and that's all that really matters





» Look, we're totally laying into this pixie and he can't do anything about it. After years of having our dinner money stolen from us, we're finally getting revenge.



» Smoothing over graphics to create a so-called 'enhanced' look is a cop-out with a massive capital C.

PRESENTATION: 75% Very nicely presented, but the 'enhanced' mode does *Golden Axe* no favours.

AESTHETICS: 70% Certainly showing its age now, but at least the music is still superb.

PLAYABILITY: 85% It's shamelessly old-school, and the lack of moves will annoy some, but it's still good fun.

LONGEVITY: 75% It's really easy to complete and all the achievements can be earned in a few plays.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 87% Of course, you've got an arcade perfect game for a couple of quid.

OVERALL 75% It's looking dated but *Golden Axe* is still good fun. The fact this is the arcade conversion is particularly special.

SUPER CONTRA

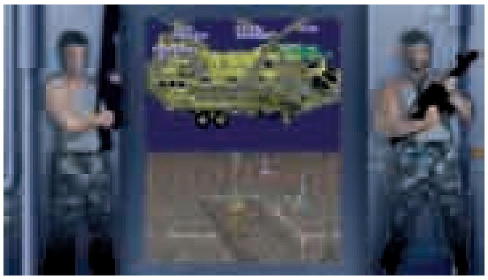
INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
» **COST:** 400 POINTS

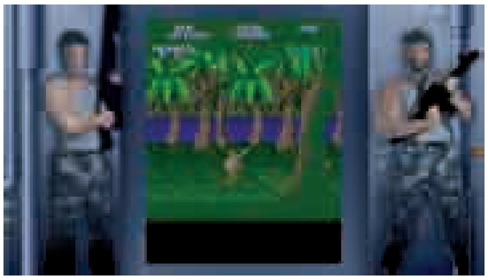
Remember when you were at playschool and you used to make patterns by painting half a potato and then sticking it on a piece of paper to make ungainly looking renditions of your parents? Digital Eclipse does, because it seems to have used exactly the same effect to create one of the ugliest wallpapers we've ever seen. Still, rather than waste this summary talking about the horrendous art, let's discuss the game, shall we?

First off, it's tough. In fact, it's probably one of the hardest run-and-gun games we've ever played. Enemies come thick and fast, death is normally only a few seconds away and you'll soon find yourself inventing all sorts of new swear words as you fly through your meagre amount of continues.

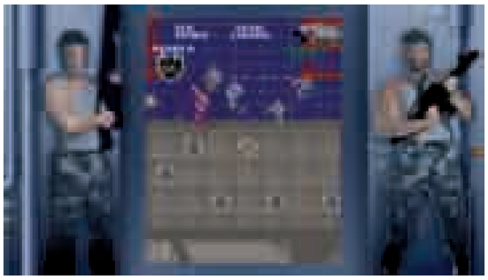
It's not all bad news, though. Gameplay is kept interesting by combining the traditional scrolling sections with some *Mercs*-styled up-the-screen runs, the weapons are also unquestionably meaty and the enhanced visuals continue to capture the spirit of the Eighties action movie. Then there's the usual insanely tough bosses that require huge amounts of fire power to destroy. Many of the achievements are well thought out and will require a fair amount of skill to obtain. If only it wasn't so darned hard…



» *Super Contra* would have been much better and a lot more enjoyable if it wasn't so difficult, and if it didn't have such horrible visuals.



» Who fancies whistling along to 'Duelling Banjos'?



» "Look what I made at school today, mummy." "That's rubbish, dear."

PRESENTATION: 20% Bland, bland, bland and what's with the potato art visuals?

AESTHETICS: 65% We're not sure about the garish colour palette and the sound is quite tinny in places.

PLAYABILITY: 70% It's certainly simple to play, but will you have the patience to persist with it?

LONGEVITY: 50% It's simply too difficult to put any serious amount of time into.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 60% It's only 400 points, but *Contra* is the better option and is available for the same price.

OVERALL 58% A fairly lazy conversion. Stick with *Contra*

RETRORATED

FATAL FURY SPECIAL

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** SNK PLAYMORE

» **COST:** 400 POINTS

Typical, isn't it? The Neo Geo's splash screen is one of the coolest things in the known gaming world and SNK Playmore hasn't included it at the beginning of *Fatal Fury Special*. Still, despite that rather major error, this is a pretty solid offering for SNK Playmore's first venture onto Microsoft's online service and it bodes very well for future releases.

Although it's not as good as Capcom's *Street Fighter* franchise, *Fatal Fury* still has plenty of great games in its canon. While we're gutted that this isn't *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, *Fatal Fury Special* is still a great introduction to the series for newcomers, and is also likely to make hardcore fans very, very happy.



» You won't see it in the actual game, so we've included the Neo Geo's beautiful splash screen for you here instead. Hum the tune while you're looking at it.

Presentation is bold and colourful, online games are surprisingly lag free (the net code appears far better than when *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* was first released) and the gameplay is as good as ever. There's a range of interesting characters to experiment with, while the ability to hop between two game-planes on many of the levels adds a surprising tactical slant to the fighting, but perhaps most importantly, Mai is just as bouncy as we remember her to be.

Throw in a variety of different difficulty modes, definable buttons (something that really hampered *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*) and some well-thought-out achievements and *Fatal Fury Special* immediately leapfrogs the opposition to sit just below *Hyper Fighting* in the Live Arcade beat-'em-up chain of command.

Sure, some will be annoyed that the superior CD soundtrack hasn't been used, and not including the original un-enhanced graphics is unforgivable, but this is still a remarkably polished debut for SNK Playmore. Let's hope *Metal Slug* gets similar treatment.



» The graphics do look good, but we would like to have seen the original un-enhanced graphics, too.



» Not as good as the *Street Fighter* series, but still a brilliant brawler that is sure to be enjoyed by newcomers and hardcore gamers.

PRESENTATION: 79% Nice and arcadey, but the lack of a splash screen loses it 20 points.

AESTHETICS: 75% Why isn't there an option to turn the smear-o-vision off?

PLAYABILITY: 88% An incredibly deep fighter with plenty of hidden moves to discover.

LONGEVITY: 83% A variety of different difficulty levels and online play will keep you going.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 90% When you consider how much the original costs, just over £3 is a bargain.

OVERALL 82% A solid scrapper and a welcome debut from SNK Playmore.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

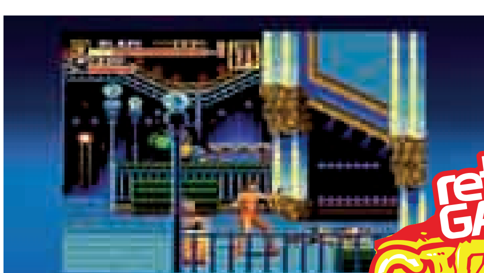
INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT

» **COST:** 400 POINTS

Dear Sega, please don't allow developers to simply blend the graphics via an emulator when you hand out the next lot of classics to be converted to Xbox Live Arcade: get them to do a proper update instead. Now we've said our piece, let us start by mentioning that this is the best version of *Streets Of Rage 2* available, and when you consider how brilliant the original Mega Drive release was that's quite an achievement.

We may have raved about the Virtual Console release that appeared last month, but we've now got our hands on the Live Arcade version and the differences between them are staggering. First things first, the game is far nippier than its 50Hz counterpart, which helps make the already frantic action even more entertaining to play. Then, of course, there are the achievements, which will guarantee that you play through this wonderful brawler several times to ensure you manage to net all of the 200 available points. Finally though, it's the ability to play online that really makes *Streets Of Rage 2* on the Xbox 360 stand head and shoulders above the Virtual Console version. We did encounter some lag in a number of the games, but it wasn't detrimental to the overall experience and greatly adds to the *Streets Of Rage* experience. Sega's scrolling fighter is widely regarded as being one of the best games of its kind, so it's unsurprising that so much care and attention has been put into this fantastic conversion. The Virtual Console's loss is certainly Xbox Live Arcade's gain.







» Forget *Manhunt 2*, a child is being beaten up by a Victorian boxer. Someone call 999.

PRESENTATION: 75% Identical to *Golden Axe*, so we've given it the same score. Clever eh?

AESTHETICS: 87% The new 'enhanced' mode isn't anything special, but at least the original is available in all its pixel-perfect glory.

PLAYABILITY: 93% Beautifully crafted and instantly accessible. Sega at its best.

LONGEVITY: 85% It won't take forever to complete, but the online mode adds extra longevity.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 92% One of the best scrolling fighters around for less than £4. You do the maths.

OVERALL 91% A brilliant adaptation of the Mega Drive hit that makes the Virtual Console release look archaic.

MISSILE COMMAND

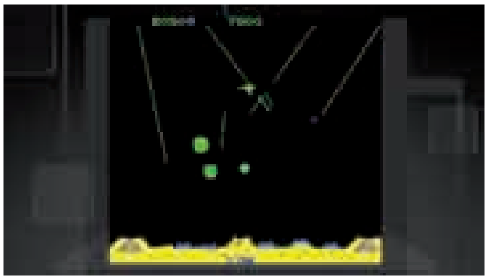
INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** STAINLESS GAMES

» **COST:** 400 POINTS

Some things just don't go very well together. Square pegs in round holes, and, um… there's… Well let's just reiterate that some things just don't work, and when Atari announced it was bringing the trackball-centric *Missile Command* to the Xbox 360 analogue stick, alarm bells of the 'iceberg straight ahead' kind should have immediately started ringing.

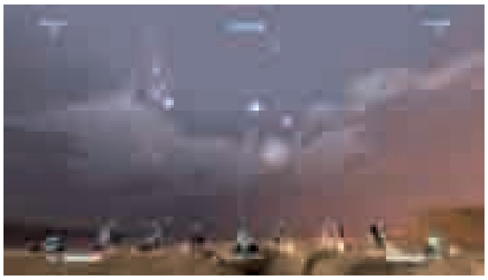
What's frustrating about this conversion is that unless you can accurately emulate the original arcade's trackball, you're never going to end up with a product that's any good. And that's where *Missile Command* fails. It looks like *Missile Command*, it sounds like *Missile Command*, but it sure doesn't play like *Missile Command*.



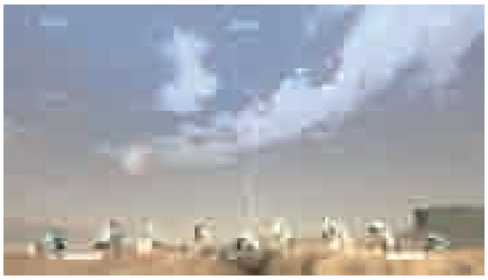
» Looks lovely, doesn't it? Shame it plays like crap.

It doesn't matter how much you change the sensitivity, an analogue stick is never going to be able emulate the speed and accuracy of a trackball so you're immediately sunk before you've even begun. It all starts off innocently enough, but it soon starts to go wrong. By the time you get to Level 6 you'll find that your cursor becomes unwieldy and develops a mind of its own. It simply becomes impossible to make any real progress and you'll soon move over to the 'enhanced' version, which features far more forgiving enemies. Even this mode is far from perfect, though, as it features that typical Xbox Live Arcade issue where developers think that 'enhanced visuals' are the digital equivalent of spewing up on a Picasso.

This is a real missed opportunity for the Xbox 360 that makes us greatly fear for any future trackball releases. There are much better games for the same price.



» An example of the so-called 'enhanced visuals'.



» The use of the analogue stick instead of the trackball makes *Missile Command* very difficult and incredibly frustrating.

PRESENTATION: 50% They do the job and that's about it.

AESTHETICS: 45% The original still looks beautiful but the enhanced visuals are just offensive.

PLAYABILITY: 38% A superb game hobbled by an unwieldy control system. What a pity.

LONGEVITY: 15% Why would you persevere with something so difficult? Go back to *Space Giraffe*, fools.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 45% Well, you do get two games for less than four pounds, but one of them looks hideous and the other is virtually unplayable.

OVERALL 37% It makes us weep, it really does, but *Missile Command* is a travesty that needs nuking.

BOMBERMAN LIVE

INFORMATION

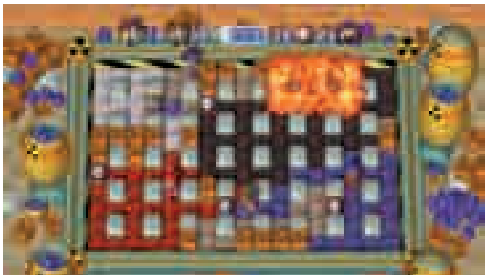
» **DEVELOPER:** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT

» **COST:** 800 POINTS

If ever a game was created for Xbox Live, it was *Bomberman*. Amazingly though, despite praying daily for it to appear on Xbox Live Arcade, now it's here we've lost interest in it.

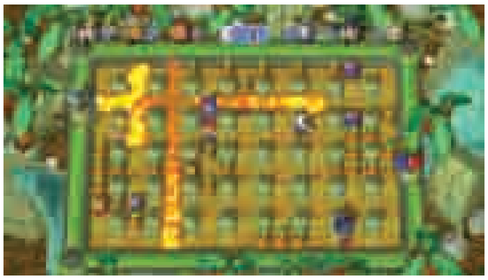
Don't get us wrong. It's fun, and it makes up for the disaster that was *Act:Zero*, but somehow, we just can't get that excited by it. So, we've had a nap, and now we're refreshed we've realised why we're not keen on *Bomberman Live*, it's simply not that great.

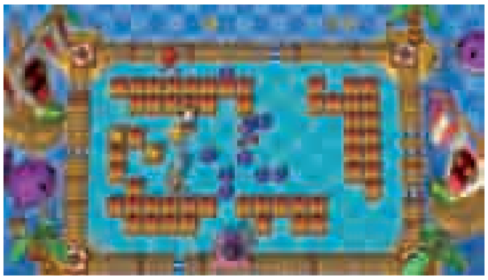
It's still a very good game, but too many tweaks have made it lack that something that makes it really special.



Rather than give us *Saturn Bomberman* with its ten-player action and flawless gameplay, we have a bizarre blend of previous *Bomberman* titles that don't gel together as well. Then there are the little things, such as the easy-to-avoid remote bombs, the mega bombs that are stupidly hard to avoid and the strangely spongy controls that make kicking bombs a bit of a lottery.

Our biggest complaint, though, is that it seems to have been designed as a cynical way of taking gamers' points, rather than just being the best version around. Take the latest release, for example. 250 points, for ten new outfits and two new levels may not sound a lot, but couldn't this have been provided for free? *Bomberman Live* is still a great addition to the series, but it should have been so much better.





» Winona the whale makes a cameo appearance. If you have kids you'll know exactly what we're on about.

PRESENTATION: 85% It all looks lovely and there's a pleasing amount of options to choose from.

AESTHETICS: 80% The viewpoint takes a while to get used to, but the soundtrack is cracking.

PLAYABILITY: 78% Spongy controls and unfair gameplay means that this isn't as balanced as we'd like.

LONGEVITY: 80% The bustling community and varied options mean there's plenty of variety.

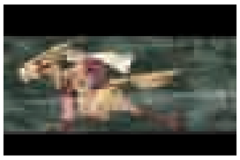
VALUE FOR MONEY: 78% It's not as cheap as we'd like and the online content isn't doing it any favours.

OVERALL 82% It's *Bomberman* online, so it's great by default. It's just not the game it should have been.

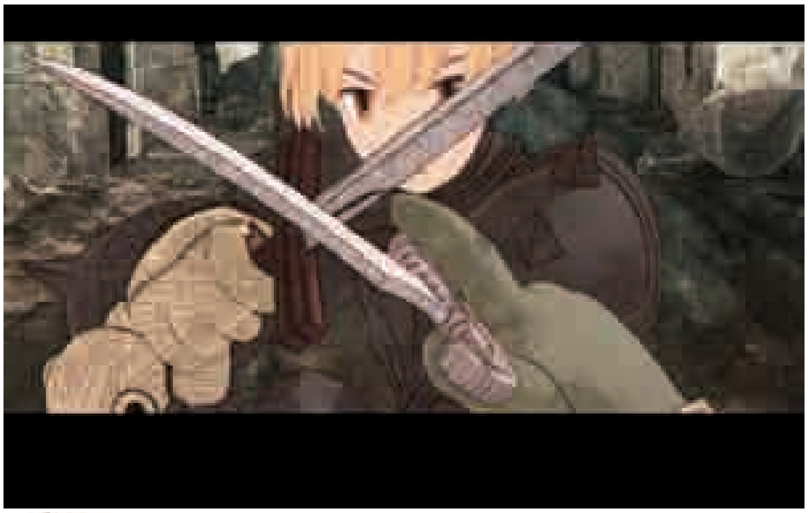
» DID YOU JUST SHAKE YOUR TACTICS AT ME?

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS: THE WAR

A LESSON IN TACTICAL PRECISION?



- » **SYSTEM:** PSP
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OCTOBER
- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1 (1-2 ONLINE)



» Here's another staggering cut-scene. (Geddit?) Sorry.



***Final Fantasy Tactics: The War Of The Lions* finally dismounts onto PlayStation Portable dressed as a spiffed-up port of the PSone game, *Final Fantasy Tactics*.** For the uninitiated, *Tactics* is the spin-off to the prolific *Final Fantasy* series, and where it differs from the main version is in its eloquent narrative (which reads like *Hamlet*) and its combat, (which I'll come to in a moment).

Set in the land of Ivalice, shortly after the end of the 50-Year War, *The War Of The Lions* has a plot that whiffs of that Nicolas Cage action film *The Rock* (but without a yellow Ferrari chase scene and the skin-melting noxious gas). Two decorated generals are considered for regency to the crown, after the prince is deemed too young to take the throne. At The Council's behest, the queen's cousin, Duke Goltana, is eventually chosen, while her brother, Duke Larg, is refused. Goltana leads the Black Lions and fights with honour to protect the Crown while an irked Larg sides with a band of dishonoured knights who have revolted against the monarch due to feeling maltreated following the war.

Rather than taking hostages inside a prison facility, they decide to form under the banner of the White Lions – hence the warring-lion title – and so sets the stage for a prolific war that is set to resonate forever in the annals of history. It's your job to lead the brave knight Ramza Beoulve and his team of mercenaries as they try to restore peace to the land of Ivalice.

Strengthened with beautiful, cel-shaded cut-scenes and delicately punctured with ink cross-hatches, it has a look that feels reminiscent of the works of Hayao Miyazaki. On top of that, its beautifully majestic score from returning *Final Fantasy XII* composer Hitoshi Sakimoto complements the game's showy narrative and ethereal visuals perfectly.

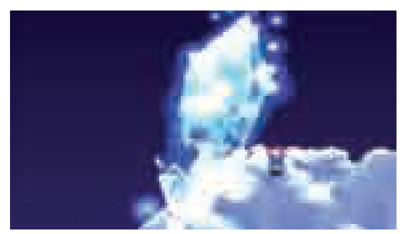


» "Look, what's wrong with saying 'bugger off', before I smash your face into the snow? Honestly."



» "You put your left foot in, your left foot out, in out, in out and shake it all about."

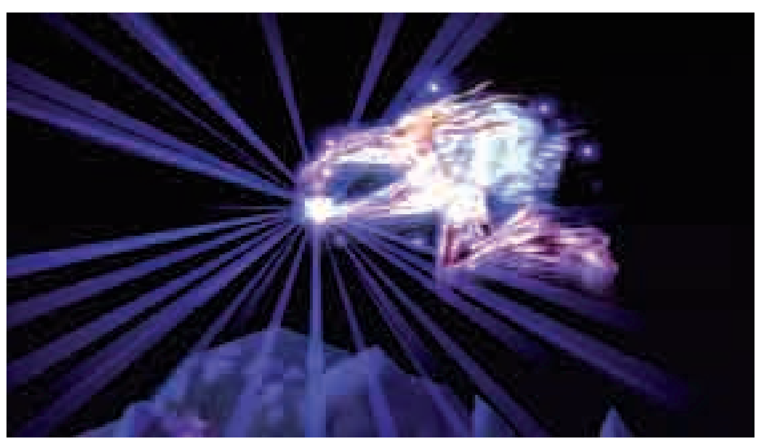
What really sets *Tactics* apart from other *Final Fantasy* games is its battles. Players are whisked into isometric rotating battlegrounds that are divided into tiles. Each turn grants you a move and an action. The areas are littered with trees and buildings that can be used to allow the weaker and injured members of your party to retreat from battle and seek cover. This encourages the enemy to come toward you but also gives you an opportunity to surround them before you make your attack, therefore adding a greater sense of



» "How many times have I told you, Tennant, 'Don't park your Tardis on my snow castle'."



» 'Okay, who's ringing me now? Er, hello, could I call you back, Cloud, I'm a little busy right now.'

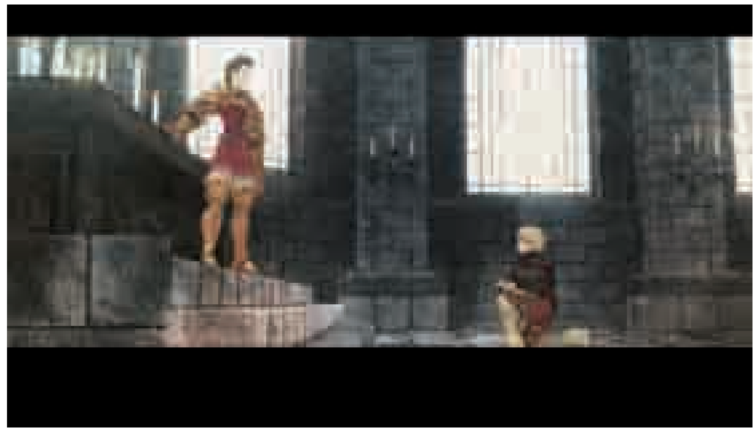


» Some of the spells that you can summon later in the game are dazzling.

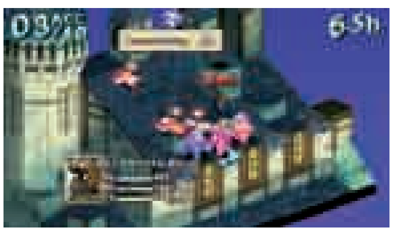
OF THE LIONS



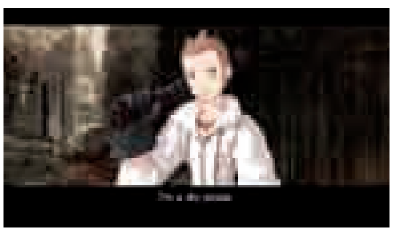
» Valuable life lesson: if you ever come up against an angry tree and a giant Furby, make sure you always have a gold feather at hand. Goes without saying, doesn't it?



» It's quite possible that *Final Fantasy Tactics* has the most beautiful cutscenes that we've ever seen in a videogame. On the other hand we don't really get out a lot, so they could look rubbish. We're sure they're not though.



» The battles take place in a variety of locations – such as the roof of the Houses of Parliament for instance.



» "You may well be a sky pirate, love, but you also have huge hands and no nose."

influence over the fighting as melees can be won through a mixture of powering up, positioning and striking foes in teams.

With the ability to customise your characters, and with 22 jobs and over four hundred abilities, the combat feels deep and the action seems extremely solid. The earlier fights tend to be a simple case of close-quarters attacking and evading, but thanks to a unique job-assigning function – which allows you to dole out roles such as knights and chemists to members of your party – eventually, potent magic attacks can be obtained that will shake the method of battle significantly.

Unfortunately, an infuriating control system and a camera that rotates around the screen far too harshly spoils the game. You'll often find your attacks and enemies blocked by polygon blind spots. The action occasionally feels like you're sitting behind a large person in the cinema as you continually move around to try to get a better view of the screen.

That said, the game is still incredibly immersive and the battles feel appropriately meaty and epic, with some of the later fights taking up to an hour to complete. The game is also jam packed with a clear and concise tutorial for anyone unfamiliar with the series. It talks you through every aspect of the game and really opens your eyes to the levels of detail and customisation Square Enix has squeezed into the game. You can outfit your men, send them on side-quests, fight against your friends wirelessly, or team up for co-operative missions. It offers an immense amount of longevity that *Final Fantasy* enthusiasts and PSP strategists will no doubt be lapping up for months.



» Look at the muted colours, look at how Square-Enix has masterfully set the scene, so that it's nice and dramatic. If only they weren't ruined by some really poxy loading times. You don't get this problem with cartridges…

IN SUMMARY

Final Fantasy Tactics: The War Of The Lions is a great game spoiled by the odd niggling problem that could have been very easily rectified – only making them all the more annoying. This prevents me from giving it a great score. I would still recommend it however, if only for its fantastic over-use of the word 'naught', which I have now incorporated into my everyday vocabulary.



OPINION

I have to agree with Stuart on this one. While *Final Fantasy* is arguably perfect for PSP, it's not without its faults. Loading times are extremely lengthy (and frequent), the aforementioned rotating camera is incredibly off-putting and the sheer amount of character classes can at first seem intimidating. Stick with it though, and you'll find a whimsical and well-written story, engaging characters and some of the most beautiful cut-scenes ever to grace Sony's handheld. *Final Fantasy Tactics* is perfect for those with plenty of time to spare, just don't expect the Second Coming.

Darran Jones

THE SCORES

Presentation: **93%**

A powerful musical score and enchanting cinematic cut-scenes frame the action perfectly.

Aesthetics: **86%**

An emotionally charged epic that looks as titillating as it is exhilarating.

Playability: **80%**

While the game feels meticulously crafted, sadly, an annoying camera continually punctuates it with frustration.

Longevity: **95%**

It's a *Final Fantasy* game, which means it has more length and depth than P Diddy's… swimming pool.

Value for Money: **85%**

It's a spruced-up and slightly re-shuffled port of an old game, but there's still plenty to offer *Tactics* aficionados.

OVERALL SCORE **85%**

HOMEBREW RATED

WE FIND OUT WHAT'S IT'S LIKE TO BE JOE SOMEBODY AGAIN WITH THIS MONTH'S SIZZLER, PLATFORM-PUZZLER JOE GUNN

JOE GUNN

"YOU LOST TODAY, KID. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO LIKE IT"



FORMAT: C64

DEVELOPED BY: GEORG ROTTENSTEINER

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

LINK: WWW.GREATGAMESEXPERIMENT.COM

PRICE: FREE

REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

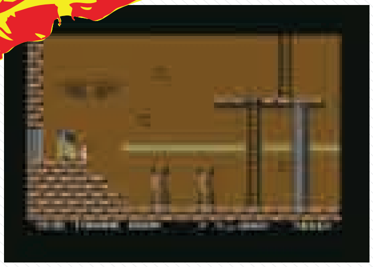
Those who dredge the web on an hourly basis, hoping to catch a fuzzy glimpse of Harrison Ford's bullwhip in the upcoming Indiana Jones film, may be pleased to hear that there's a stopgap tomb raider whipping up a storm on the retro circuit. We unearthed this new platform-puzzler last issue, but this month we finally got our hands on *Joe Gunn* and together we embarked on a mighty fine, homebrewed adventure.

Joseph J Gunn has stepped up to uncover the mystery of the Crocodile King by entering his ancient booby-trapped pyramid. Joe needs you to guide him safely through the labyrinthine tomb, and delicately traverse its crumbling platforms while preventing him from becoming a permanent part of the sandy fixtures.

In typical *Rick Dangerous* fashion, the game is a usual 'find the relevant-looking sprite to give to the other relevant-looking sprite' affair, but where this game gleams like a coke-soaked penny is in its design, puzzles and its main protagonist, Joe. Had this game been released during the C64 heyday, Joe Gunn would have



» 'You couldn't spare any lose change, could you, mate?'



» For a little guy, Joe's got a tightly wound spring in his step

become a household name, etching his name into the annals of iconic videogame heroes and garnering all sorts of awards and high percentages in *Zzap!64*. As it is, he'll just have to make do with a **Retro Gamer** Sizzler and a pat on the back instead.

Armed only with a jump and a nifty animated climb, Joe might not have the fighting prowess of Dr Jones but he's certainly got stronger legs. With levels that require dangling from great heights and puzzles that will see you methodically flit between carefully positioned ledges, it's a good job that when Joe falls a hundred feet he will delicately land on the floor like a cricket umpire with ninja qualities.

With neat little touches like static animations, boulder chases, giant snakes and blood-splattered spikes, the game is as much a pastiche as it is annoyingly addictive. Joe Gunn is a great homebrew title from the talented Georg Rottensteiner, and one you'll be thankful you took the time to discover.

PRESENTATION: 90% It plays great and looks a little like a NES game

AESTHETICS: 90% It's so good that I had to boot up *Chase HQ* just to reaffirm my love for the Amstrad

PLAYABILITY: 90% An immediately engrossing run-and-jump adventure

LONGEVITY: 80% It offers a great mix of head-scratching puzzles and finger-punishing dexterity

VALUE FOR MONEY: 100% Well, it is free

OVERALL 90%

HARRIER ATTACK 2

'RETRO GAMER TOWERS, THIS IS GHOST RIDER REQUESTING A FLYBY'



FORMAT: PC

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

DEVELOPED BY: DURELL

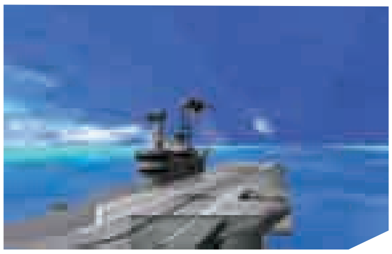
LINK: WWW.DURELLGAMES.COM

PRICE: £12.99

REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

Darran may have revealed in issue 41 that he opted to play *Harrier Attack* last, from the Amsoft CPC bumper pack, but Durell's dogfighter was the first game that I selected to pop into my Amstrad cassette deck. Sure, it didn't look anything special (I remember the sprites reminded me of ants), but I always had a huge amount of fun with it. It's easy to look at *Harrier Attack* and throw it onto that generic pile of plane-based blasters, but to do so is actually doing it a great injustice.

Taking three years of hard slog, Durell has finally released a PC successor to *Harrier Attack*, and while the ants have now evolved into gloriously crisp Airfix models and the sky



» Before you take to the sky you're treated to a nifty cut-scene.

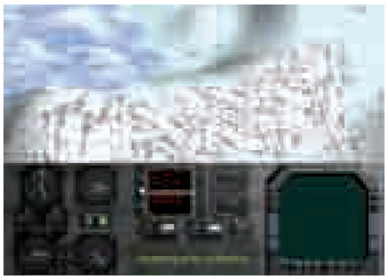
no longer forms a solid block of cyan, the original's sense of non-intrusive strategy has thankfully remained.

Spanning three campaigns, split into a collection of varying missions, the game offers an immense amount of bullet for your buck. You can still seek the clouds for cover, call upon differing methods of fire to attack your enemies and, yes, you can still bomb your own carrier.

Veterans will immediately spot the subtle tweaks to the game: your plane's status has now lost those archaic green meters and sitting comfortably in its place is a gleaming new hub, housing your radar, clocking your speed and showing your fuel waving goodbye. All the elements of the original are present and accounted for.

If I had to find fault, I would say that due to the speed of the game, it can be very easy to overshoot enemies and become somewhat of a sitting Goose (look, I had to squeeze another *Top Gun* joke in somewhere), but my moan is softened somewhat by the use of handy power-ups that allow you to customise your metallic bird.

Varying from evasive manoeuvres to chaff dropping, these prizes are unlocked by completing missions and can be swapped and



» 'Sir, we have a lock on our target Mr Frosty.'

applied in between the dogfights to offer a huge advantage in the prevailing battles.

Harrier Attack 2 is extremely playable, looks great and feels staggeringly quick. It's a must-have homebrew title for fans of the original, and I wholeheartedly urge anyone pining for a nostalgic, side-scrolling shooter to go and get their head in the clouds.

PRESENTATION: 89% I'm a fan of the original's foreboding ant-look. This version still looks great, though

AESTHETICS: 85% It looks and sounds great; a crisp, solid update

PLAYABILITY: 85% A few frustrating niggles, but nothing to detract from making a purchase

LONGEVITY: 89% I still play the original

VALUE FOR MONEY: 70% Quite pricey

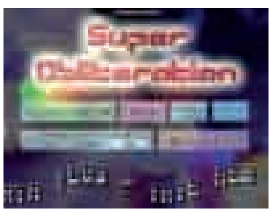
OVERALL 88%

ONCE ALL THE BAD TOP GUN REFERENCES WERE OUT OF THE WAY, WE GOT DOWN TO THE RATHER SPIFFY SUPER OBLITERATION

SUPER OBLITERATION

DAMN, I JUST CAN'T THINK OF A GOOD FILM QUOTE...

FORMAT: PC, MAC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: HTTP://WWW.TCKSOFT.CO.UK/DOWNLOAD.PHP?VIEW.25
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: DARRAN JONES



Most remakes are modelled on classics that everyone and his dog has played, or those obscure titles that they once fell in love with as a child (probably because they didn't know any better). So it's somewhat unusual to learn that this month's remake was first found on the front of *Amiga Power*. Don't let that put you off though, as the original was a superb freebie that played like a cross between *Pang* and *Turrican* and proved to be a highly entertaining blaster that tested your reflexes.



» Diamonds can be picked up for bonus points while that yellow icon to the left stops rocks for a limited period.

Taking control of *Turrican*, you're required to do nothing more than blast the boulders that float aimlessly above you. *Turrican*'s movement is dealt with by the cursor keys – up enables you to leap gracefully into the air – while firing is handled with the mouse. It's an intuitive system that works brilliantly.

Shooting a boulder causes it to break into two smaller ones, and if you're not careful the screen can soon be littered with floating debris that, if you touch it, will rob you of one of your three lives. Fortunately, several stages provide you with cover to hide behind and there is a selection of weapons, such as homing missiles to make your life a little easier.

While *Super Obliteration* is definitely a solid blaster, there are a couple of criticisms that prevent it from being exemplary. Our biggest problem is with the scoring system itself. It's a little bit too simple for our tastes – destroying rocks always results in the same score and you'll get bonuses for dropped items and your remaining time – so re-playing through the same early levels and knowing that there's no real room for improvement does tend to grate a little.



» Careful with these platforms, it's easy to get stuck on them.

There's also the disastrous fact that you can occasionally get stuck on platforms, not to mention the lack of variety in the range of power-ups. We expected more. Still, there's no denying that this is a solid remake, it's just a shame that some of our issues with the original game weren't rectified.

PRESENTATION: 50% There's some nice options, but it all looks rather bland
AESTHETICS: 66% Not the prettiest of game we've ever layed eyes on
PLAYABILITY: 85% Controls are nice and fluid and it's easy to get to grips with
LONGEVITY: 85% The online scoreboard already has some tough scores to beat
VALUE FOR MONEY: 95% Definately, it's free

OVERALL 80%

BEACH BUGGY SIMULATOR

MAYBE THAT SHOULD BE 'BEACH VEHICLE PORKY-PIE'



- » **PUBLISHER:** SILVERBIRD
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE RACER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** CPC
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

Developer Sysoft opted to go down the stark-raving-bonkers route with its side-scrolling racer *Beach Buggy Simulator,* unlike Codemasters which at least tried to offer some realism to its 'simulation' titles.

While we appreciate that there were probably some people who were left disappointed with this purchase – expecting that it would offer a true account of driving a buggy across mountainous sand dunes in the arid desert heat – there were also those, like ourselves, who actually loved the almost platform-game zaniness of it all.

We loved the fact that the buggy was a pink open-top Beetle on the loading screen, but a red sports car with big wheels in the game. We loved the fact that it was mathematically impossible to stay alive for longer than two seconds and that you could fire saveloys from your bonnet. We also loved the fact that your car could jump in the air… particularly on Level 3 when you came up against those giant worms from *Tremors.* With its beach setting justifying at least one-third of its moniker, it's fair to say that the game's title was a complete miscarriage of title-validity, but it was great fun, nonetheless.

Beach Buggy Simulator allowed you to test the mettle of your flash buggy by driving it across the most dangerous stretch of land imaginable. Avoiding precariously placed cactuses, boulders, flames, and fire-breathing helicopters, you had to keep one eye on the hazard-strewn track and the other on your thimble-sized fuel gauge to ensure you reached the finish line before your time ran out.

Handily, to keep your fuel topped up, God would step in and throw down fuel cylinders for you to drive into. We've often pondered how great it would be if we could just fill up our cars by driving into petrol pumps, avoiding the rigmarole of parking up, wrestling with the hose and trying not to over-pump by a penny. Oh Sysoft, how we wish we could have lived in this economical fuel-dispensing world that you so beautifully painted with your warm yellow pixels.




BUGGY
FUEL
TIME

BARGAIN HUNT

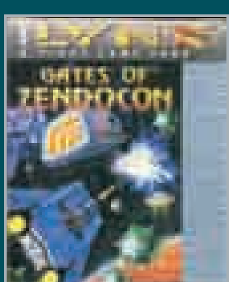
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is *Retro Gamer's* buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

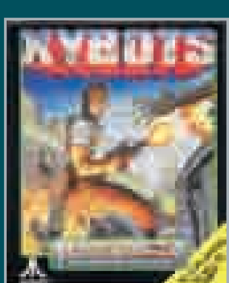
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. This month: Atari Lynx games.

GATES OF ZENDOCON
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£11.15**



XYBOTS
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£26.01**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

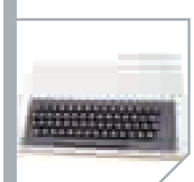
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released.
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



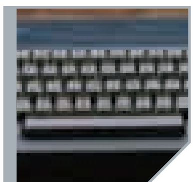
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

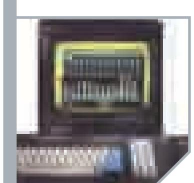
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor.



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**

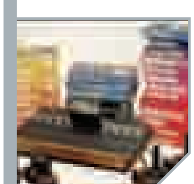
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

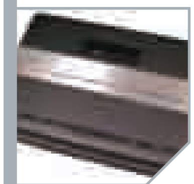
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

ROCKING HORSE SHIT
HEN'S TEETH
LUCKY FIND
EBAY REGULAR
CAR-BOOT SALE BARGAIN



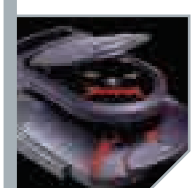
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

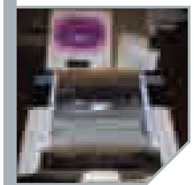


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

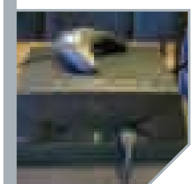
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



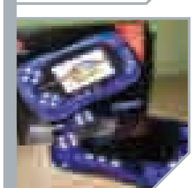
PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best-selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

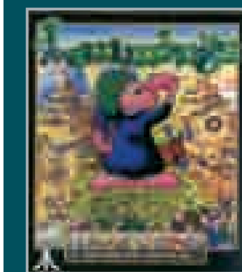


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

NINJA GAIDEN
Normally sells for: **£10**
Ended at **£3.49**



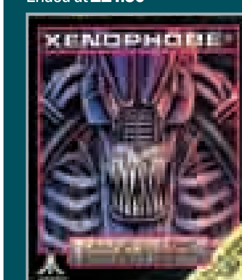
LEMMINGS
Normally sells for **£60**
Ended at **£46.01**



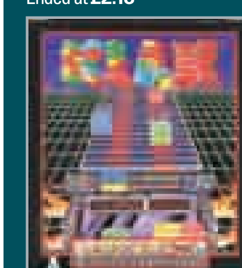
BLUE LIGHTNING
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No Sale**



XENOPHOBE
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£21.60**



KLAX
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£2.18**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**

The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- JAMES BLUNT - ALL THE LOST SOULS
- BLUR - THINK TANK
- THE KILLERS - HOT FUSS



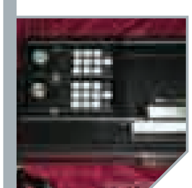
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

More insanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their its PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**

Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Failed console by Emerson that had numerous different clones released, as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act. Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**

After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



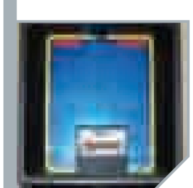
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



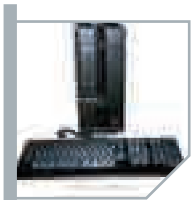
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE

X68000

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

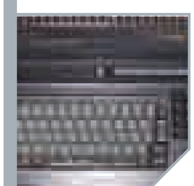
MSX

MSX 1

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES

MSX 2

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

MSX 2+

» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL

MSX TURBO R

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

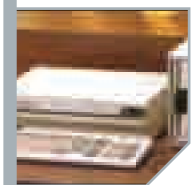
NEC

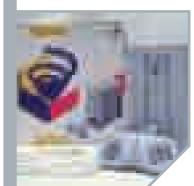
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)

» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.

PC-8801

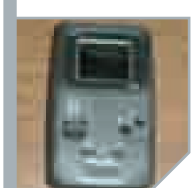
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.

PC-9801

» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.

PCFX

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)

PC-ENGINE

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.

PC-ENGINE GT

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.

TURBO GRAFX-16

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.

TURBO EXPRESS

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN

SUPER GRAFX

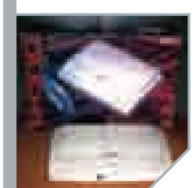
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS

PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD

» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PC-E and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.

PCE DUO/TURBO DUO

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PC-E/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

DUO-R

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PC-E Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO

FAMICOM

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!

FAMICOM AV

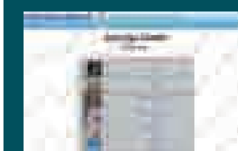
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM

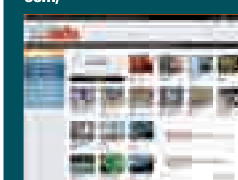
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

RETRO GAMING SITES

SEGAGAGA DOMAIN
Site owner Yakumo likes nothing more than tracking down Japanese Sega games and writing little mini-reviews on them. It's a superb resource when looking for some of the more obscure resources and is also the home of the rather brilliant Retro Core: an excellent video show that gives valuable insight into the world of Japanese gaming.
www.segagagadomain.com

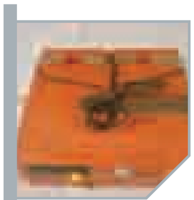


VIDEOGAME ADS
We've mentioned this website numerous times in the past, but there's something immensely satisfying about watching a bunch of Eighties-dressed dweebs playing *The Legend Of Zelda*. Granted, there are plenty of new ads – the Kirby DS one is amazing, by the way – but it's the classics from the late Eighties and early Nineties that prove to be the most entertaining. Dig around and you'll find plenty of gold.
http://gameads.gamepressure.com/



ZEE-3.COM
One of the most annoying aspects of missing Retro North was not being able to meet the Pickford Brothers. Granted, you can find them on RLLMUK, but we were going to bribe them with a few beers in order to find out what was happening with their Feud remake. We'll just have to make do with their marvellous website instead.
www.zee-3.com





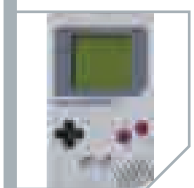
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



GAME&WATCH

» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi.



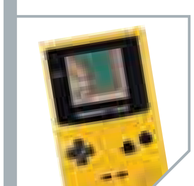
GAME BOY B/W

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE

» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



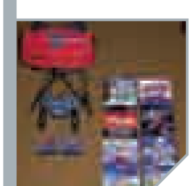
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)

» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



CD-I 205/210/220

» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



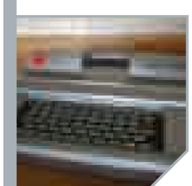
CD-I 450/500

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000

» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



32X

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



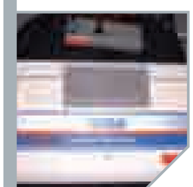
DREAMCAST

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history. The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad

hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II

» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**

The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.



GENESIS 3

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.

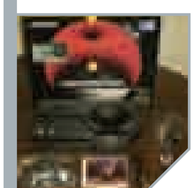


NOMAD

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**

Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**

A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**

Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**

Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.

- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.

- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR



ZX-80

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**

Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.

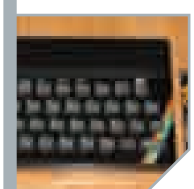


ZX-81

» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**

Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +3

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**

The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

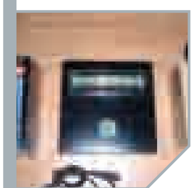
SNK



NEO-GEO AES

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**

High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEO-GEO MVS

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**

High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR



NEO-GEO CD

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**

CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

RADIO SEGA

Sega fans rejoice. Radio Sega is back again and it's been given a brand-new overhaul. There are now even more tracks to listen to, the latest Sega and retro news is quickly updated on the main site and it's still possible to make requests. Our only complaint is that we should be able to listen to *Risky Ride*, *Flight* and *The Concept Of Love* whenever we want to. Sort it out, Mark.
www.radiosega.net



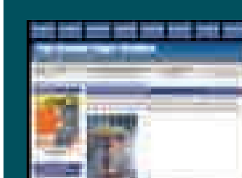
RPG GAMER

RPG Gamer is possibly the most comprehensive videogame site that we've ever had the pleasure of stumbling across. While it features in-depth reviews and walkthroughs for all the latest games there are still plenty of guides for those that follow the retro path. Everything, from the *Bard's Tale* to *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, is covered here, meaning that your favourite RPG is bound to get a mention.
www.rpgamer.com



THE ARCADE FLYERS ARCHIVE

Sometimes life is pretty bad. Maybe your dog has just been put down, or your wife has been cheating on you. But don't worry, salvation can be found by visiting this site. A world of atrocious arcade art from the Eighties and Nineties is available and mighty funny some of it is, too. Don't believe us? Then look for the US *Mortal Kombat* ad.
http://arcadeflyers.com/



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

retro GAMER

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 08 NOV 2007

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THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF...

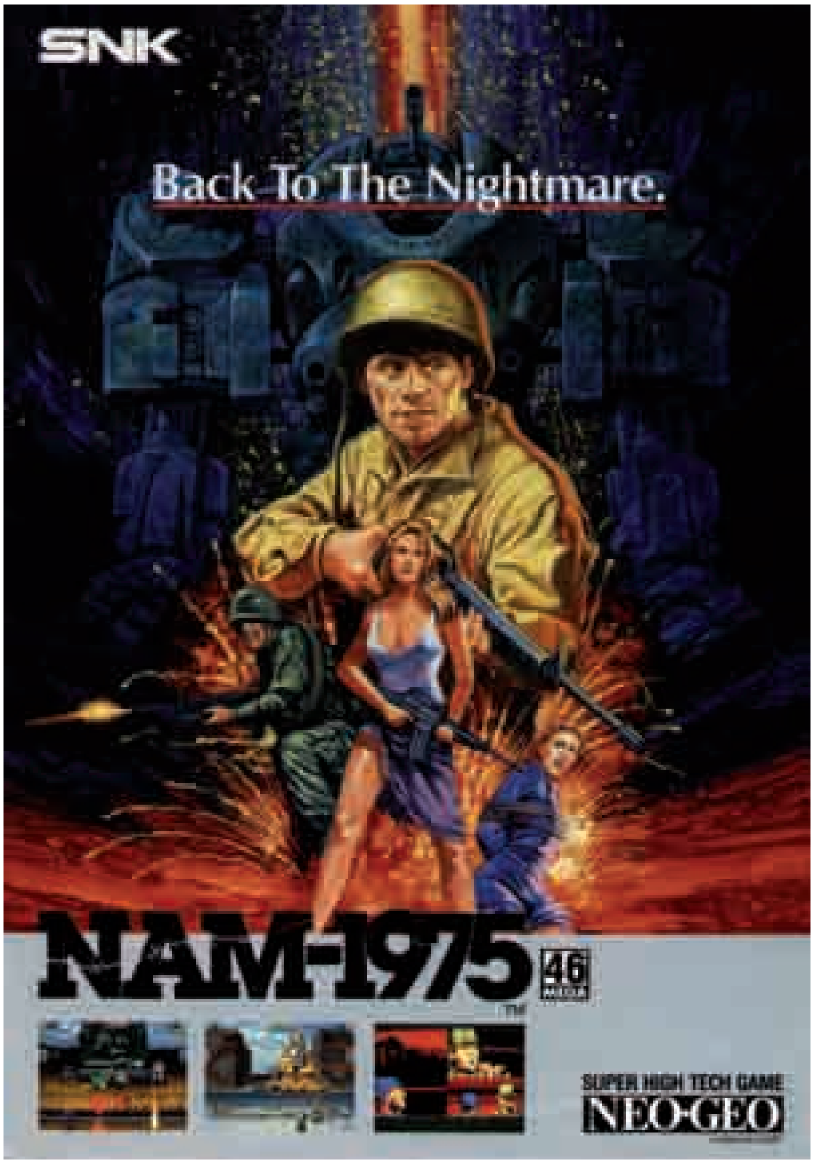
DOOM

IT REVOLUTIONISED THE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER, TURNED ID INTO MEDIA DARLINGS AND WAS SCARIER THAN A DATE WITH PARIS HILTON. GRAB YOURSELF A CHAIN SAW AND PREPARE TO FACE YOUR DOOM



OTHER EXCITING FEATURES...

- With Electronic Arts recently announcing a brand new *Populous* for the DS, there's never been a better time to look back at the original Bullfrog classic
- Our latest retroinspection investigates Sega's 8-bit Master System and uncovers a console that's teaming with a wealth of superb games
- James Pond is the most popular videogame fish of all time, so join **Retro Gamer** as we look back at the making of his often-criticised platform games



NAM-1975

Intent on stopping the evil Dr Muckly, two of America's finest head back to 'Nam to bring him to justice. But will they return home in a body bag?



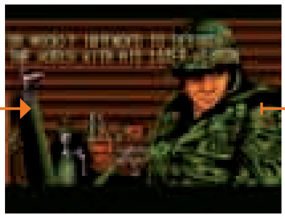
SCREEN 1
It's the final showdown, and even though Dr Muckly is confined to a wheelchair and looks like Colonel Sanders' older brother, our heroes have no problem with taking him down.



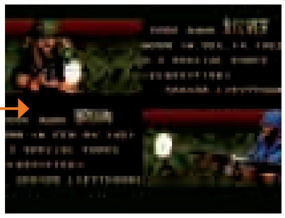
SCREEN 2
After being riddled with enough bullets to stop Alex Murphy, the old codger feigns the need for a toilet break and quickly disappears off screen. Possibly to cough up a perforated lung.



SCREEN 3
Looks like the cad was just pretending to need the toilet, as he suddenly turns up in a huge mech and is more dangerous than ever. Still, you gotta love those eyebrows.



SCREEN 4
With Dr Muckly defeated, and his giant robot consigned to nothing more than scrap iron, our two heroes head home. It wasn't an easy task, but at least our two friends can rest easy. Or can they…



SCREEN 5
Dwight Thomas is furious to discover that he's been coldly referred to as code name 'Brown'. He sues SNK for racial insensitivity and uses his compensation to sail around the world. The End.